



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

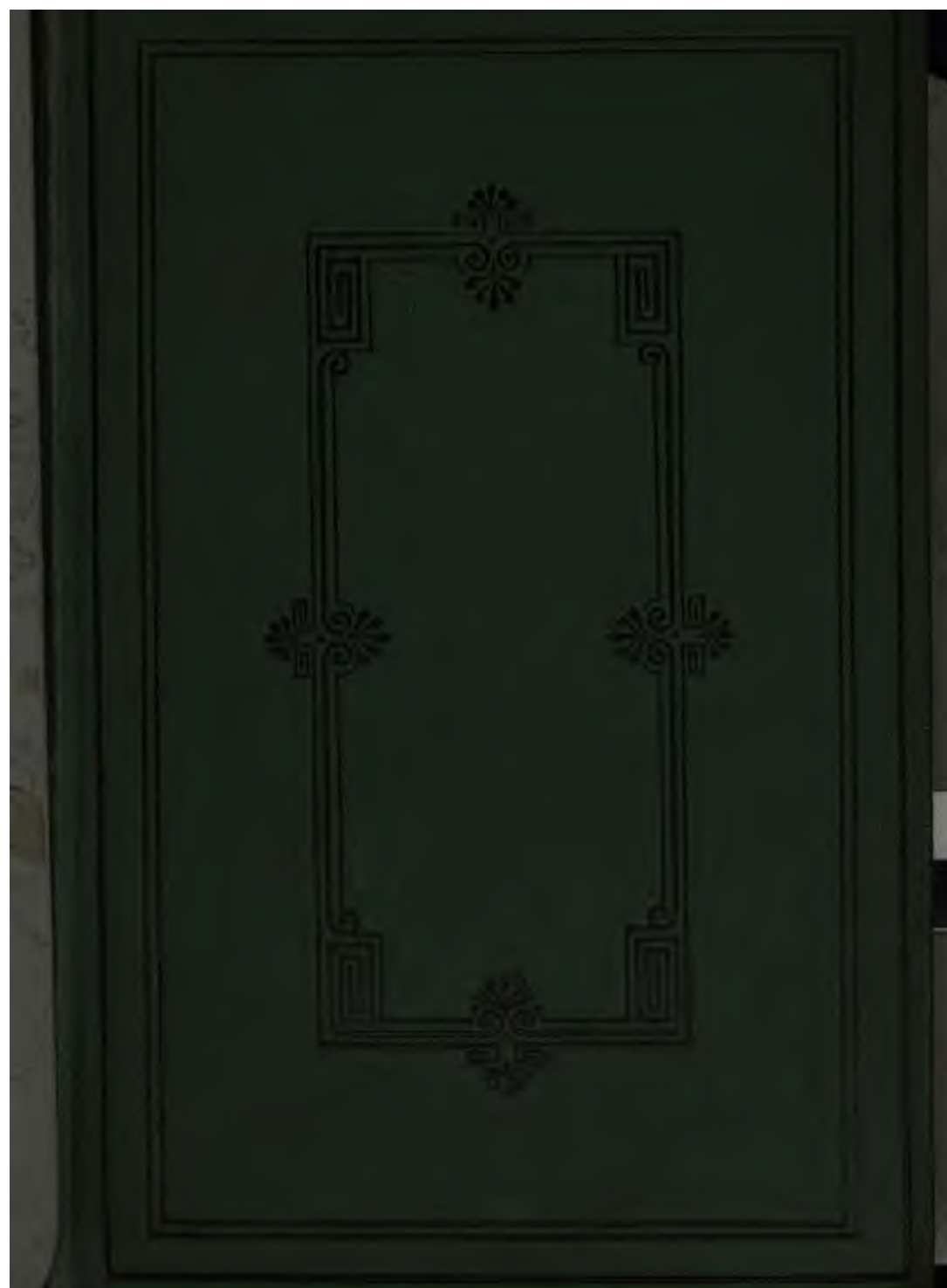
Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>





091309S



THE
BEAUTY OF THE WORD
IN THE
SONG OF SOLOMON

By M. WRIGHT



*And he hath put a new song in my mouth, praise unto our God : many shall
see, and fear, and shall trust in the LORD.*

Ps. XL. 3.

*Now we see through a glass, darkly ; but then face to face : now I know in part ;
but then shall I know even as also I am known.*

1 COR. XIII. 12.

LONDON
JAMES NISBET & CO., 21 BERNERS STREET
1872.

101. f. 365.

EDINBURGH : PRINTED BY THOMAS AND ARCHIBALD CONSTABLE,
PRINTERS TO THE QUEEN, AND TO THE UNIVERSITY.

THIS LITTLE WORK
IS COMMENDED TO THE PRAYERFUL STUDY OF
"ALL WHO LOVE THE LORD JESUS CHRIST IN SINCERITY,"
BEING
THE MEMBERS OF HIS MYSTICAL BODY
WHO IS
THE HEAD
AND FILLETH ALL IN ALL.

"For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh.

*"This is a great mystery :
but I speak concerning Christ and the Church" (EPH. v. 30-32).
"He that is joined unto the Lord is one Spirit" (1 COR. vi. 17).*



PREFACE.

ANY attempt to explain even the simplest portion of the Word of God must of necessity be feeble and imperfect. The words which from childhood have been familiar to us have a depth of meaning which the intellect of man, unassisted by God's Spirit, would strive in vain to fathom. And if it be so with other portions of Scripture, what can be said of the sublime Song of Solomon? How superficial must be our examination of it,—how weak our efforts to catch the meaning, or search into the deep things of God, hidden in each verse! If a study of this poem did nothing more than convince us of our own foolishness, it were well to look into it: but when God gave us His Word, He did it not for this purpose only, or we would be so disheartened and perplexed that we might lay aside the work as weariness, and deem its study useless toil. With a heart looking to God for wisdom to unravel their mysteries, we may reverently search into the

most difficult portions of Scripture; confident that the Lord will Himself be our guide, and make rough places plain. Many a verse apparently barren will, when searched into, *prayerfully comparing Scripture with Scripture*, prove a mine of gold, and cause us to exclaim with David, "I rejoice at thy word, as one that findeth great spoil" (Ps. cxix. 162).

The Song of Solomon resembles a chain, of which the value consists not merely in the precious material of which it is formed, but in the exquisite workmanship and beautiful appropriateness with which each link is united. Verse follows verse in such a way, that the more we study the book the more convinced we feel that its origin is Divine. The words, like the works of God, will bear the microscope: and (unlike the words and works of man) show greater beauty the more closely we examine them.

The whole Bible should be taken as a commentary on this poem. In it we see the Church (from its commencement) as a being separated from the world, and drawn by the love of Christ to put herself under His protection and guidance. We see her weakness, and many falls; notwithstanding which her progress in Divine life continues; and she passes from strength to strength, till at last in Zion she appears before God.

Naturally, one would imagine the close of the seventh chapter finished the book. Not so; she seems in the eighth to go over the arguments used when lodging in the villages and examining the vineyards; and then, looking back over all the way the Lord had led her, she speaks of the vineyard the Prince of Peace had committed to her care, and the glorious reward promised at His appearing. It was not without reason the Jews named Ecclesiastes the Porch; Proverbs, the Holy Place; and the Song of Solomon the Holiest of all. When a man feels the vanity of all earthly enjoyments and pursuits, and comes to the conclusion that to "fear God and keep His commandments" is "the whole duty of man," we may well believe He is "not far from the kingdom of God." When a man takes the proverbs of the Wisest—the words of Solomon's great antitype—as the rule of his life, we may know that he belongs to the kingdom, and is walking in the "ways of pleasantness" and the "paths of peace." *But when shall a man attain to making the sublime song of peace his own? When will his heart respond to each note of this great marriage hymn?* On earth we cannot *fully* comprehend it. In this state of being our minds are too blinded, our hearts too double, wavering, and heavy. Yet borne on the shoulders and resting on the bosom

of our great High Priest we may enter in; and seeking from Him that our eyes may be opened to the wondrous things of this Divine poem, pray that for His dear sake we may at least get a glimpse within the veil.

THE SONG OF SOLOMON;

OR

THE SONG OF SONGS.

CHAPTER I.

VER. 1. *The Song of songs, which is Solomon's.*

THE name Solomon means *peaceable*. The promise was made to David that a son should be born to him, who should be a man of rest : the Lord would give him rest from all his enemies round about ; for his name should be Solomon (*peaceable*), and God would give peace and quietness unto Israel in his days (1 Chron. xxii. 9). It was as type of the "Prince of Peace" that Solomon wrote this Song ; and amongst the "thousand and five" mentioned in 1 Kings iv. 33 it alone is preserved to us. May the Spirit of God open our understanding, and enable us to see in some degree its exquisite beauty !

The Song of peace is indeed the "Song of songs." It is the outward expression of *the joy* which is felt by those who realize *the peace*. "Being justified by faith we have *peace* with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ : by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and *rejoice* in hope of the glory of

God." "If, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son" (the Prince of Peace); "much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. And not only so, but we also joy in God, through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. v. 1, 2, 10, 11).

As this joy exceeds all other joy, so this Song is more excellent than any other.

The Song is Solomon's, but it is sung by the Bride. It is the Spirit of Christ in the Church (as in the individual Christian) which enables her to rejoice. "He hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God" (Ps. xl. 3).

Would that this were the experience, not of a single Christian, but of all the people of God!

Ver. 2. *Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth:*

The first desire of the awakened Church, as of the awakened soul, is, contact with Christ. She longs for the kisses of the Son¹—pledges of His love,—assurance of peace through Him. Let Him kiss me, and all is well. It is the strong prayer of faith which pushes aside all obstacles, and determines in God's strength that nothing shall come between Him and her. It is the intense ardour (Heaven-born) to realize the fulness of the peace and joy which He has purchased: to appropriate without a misgiving, every one of the sweet promises which "the mouth of the Lord" hath spoken.

For thy love is better than wine.

"Wine, which maketh glad the heart of man" (Ps. civ. 15); which is to be given "unto him that is ready

¹ "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. *Blessed are all they that put their trust in him*" (Ps. ii. 12).

to perish," "unto those that be of heavy hearts:" that they may drink and forget their poverty, and remember their misery no more (Prov. xxxi. 6, 7). His love revived her when ready to perish, made her forget her poverty, and rejoiced her heart. "Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation" (Hab. iii. 17, 18).

The fruit of the vine was used by the Saviour as the symbol of His blood: "This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Matt. xxvi. 28). The shedding of the blood proved the depth of His love: for "greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John xv. 13).

As the antitype excels the type, and the substance the shadow, so "thy love is better than wine."

Ver. 3. Because of the savour of thy good ointments, thy name is as ointment poured forth, therefore do the virgins love thee.

We have in Exodus xxx. 22-33 an account of this ointment: "The LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Take thou also unto thee principal spices, of pure myrrh five hundred shekels, and of sweet cinnamon half so much, even two hundred and fifty shekels, and of sweet calamus two hundred and fifty shekels, and of cassia five hundred shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary, and of oil-olive an hin. And thou shalt make it an oil of

holy ointment, an ointment compound after the art of the apothecary : it shall be an holy anointing oil. And thou shalt anoint the tabernacle of the congregation therewith, and the ark of the testimony, and the table and all his vessels, and the candlestick and his vessels, and the altar of incense, and the altar of burnt-offering with all his vessels, and the laver and his foot. And thou shalt sanctify them, that they may be most holy : whatsoever toucheth them shall be holy. And thou shalt anoint Aaron and his sons, and consecrate them, that they may minister unto me in the priest's office. And thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel, saying, This shall be an holy anointing oil unto me throughout your generations. Upon man's flesh shall it not be poured ; neither shall ye make any other like it, after the composition of it : it is holy, and it shall be holy unto you. Whosoever compoundeth any like it, or whosoever putteth any of it upon a stranger, shall even be cut off from his people."

David (inspired by the Spirit of God) tells us what this ointment signified : "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity ! It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard ; that went down to the skirts of his garments" (Ps. cxxxiii. 1, 2). In Ephesians iv. 3 the unity it represented is called "the unity of the Spirit." In the solemn interview recorded in John xvii. we are privileged to hear our great High Priest interceding with the Father, that the holy ointment which was poured forth without measure upon Him, might from Him descend even to the very least of His followers : "Neither pray I for these" (the eleven) "alone, but for them also which

shall believe on me through their word ; that they all may be one ; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us : that the world may believe that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them ; that they may be one, even as we are one : I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one ; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me."

This ointment was specially set apart for consecrating kings ("I have found David my servant ; with my holy oil have I anointed him," Ps. lxxxix. 20) and priests ("Thou shalt anoint Aaron and his sons, and consecrate them," Exod. xxx. 30). Under the new covenant, Christians are said to be "an holy priesthood," "a royal priesthood" (1 Pet. ii. 5, 9), made by Jésus "kings and priests unto God" (Rev. i. 6 ; v. 10). The command not to pour it upon man's flesh was peremptory ; and we are told that "they that are in the flesh cannot please God. But," adds the apostle, "ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now, if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his" (Rom. viii. 8, 9). It follows therefore that none but the children of God can be set apart as "kings and priests" unto Him ; and that *before they can minister unto the Lord in these united holy offices, they must be consecrated by an outpouring of that heavenly love which Paul calls "the unity of the Spirit ;" and without which, he declares in 1 Cor. xiii. 1, 2, he would be "nothing."*

Has the Church of the present day been baptized with this love ? or is she content to believe that the

holy ointment rests upon the head of her High Priest, and is not seeking to have it descend upon each member of His mystical body? "I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them" (Ezek. xxxvi. 37).

It is "*because of the savour of thy good ointments*" that "the virgins love thee." "The unity of the Spirit" is prayed for by the Saviour, on the ground that *thus* the world may know that God has sent Him. The Spirit of Christ (manifested in the Christian Church) will yet draw multitudes to Him. When the righteousness of Zion goes forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth; *then* shall the Gentiles come to her light, and kings to the brightness of her rising (Isa. lx. and lxii.) It is prophesied (and therefore promised) in Psalm xlv. 14, 15, that "the virgins, *her companions that follow her*, shall be brought unto" Christ. "With gladness and rejoicing shall they be brought."

Ver. 4. *Draw me, we will run after thee.*

Behold the attractive power of the Cross! "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me" (John xii. 32). "The preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is *the power of God*" (1 Cor. i. 18). "It is *the power of God* unto salvation, to every one that believeth" (Rom. i. 16). By means of it God draws His people; for no man can come to Christ except the Father draw him (John vi. 44), and He draws them "with cords of a man, with bands of love" (Hos. xi. 4). When drawn, "let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race

that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith" (Heb. xii. 1, 2). This following after Christ is the test of discipleship: "Whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple" (Luke xiv. 27). "*We will run after thee.*" *We, not I alone.* How appropriately this "Draw me, we will run after thee," follows "the unity of the Spirit," spoken of in the third verse!

The King hath brought me into his chambers.

She calls him King. This is not the language of the world. Practically, it says "We will not have this man to reign over us" (Luke xix. 14). *Jesus declared Himself a king.* "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice." *The Bride has heard His voice, and she takes Jesus at His word.* Her faith and that of the dying thief are identical. To him Jesus was a king: "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom" (Luke xxiii. 42). To all Christians there is but "one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Eph. iv. 5). It is God's will that Jesus should be recognised as King; for "him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour" (Acts v. 31). He it is who has set this King upon His "holy hill of Zion" (Ps. ii. 6). The Saviour who has loved us with "an everlasting love," and with "loving-kindness" has "drawn" us (Jer. xxxi. 3), is the King who rules us by His word.

"*The King hath brought me.*" From first to last it is His work. He is "the author" as well as "the finisher of our faith" (Heb. xii. 2). "*He hath brought me into his chambers.*" We read in 1 Kings vi. 5

that Solomon built chambers round about, upon (against, or joining to) the wall of the house of the LORD. In the spiritual temple erected by the "Prince of Peace," are chambers into which He sometimes brings His people. "Through wisdom" this house is builded; and by understanding it is established; and by knowledge shall the chambers be filled with all precious and pleasant riches (Prov. xxiv. 3, 4). When heavy affliction comes, or when terror causes the heart of man to sink, how sweet the invitation,—*"Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee; hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast!"* (Isa. xxvi. 20.) *"For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion: in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me"* (Ps. xxvii. 5). In these chambers what "precious and pleasant riches" does He reveal to His people! *"Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit"* (1 Cor. ii. 9, 10).

Oh! why do we not seek more earnestly to acquaint ourselves with God in Christ, by prayer and the study of His Word: seeing that it is "by knowledge the chambers shall be filled with all precious and pleasant riches"?

We will be glad and rejoice in thee.

The revelation of His love, made to her in these chambers, causes her to "rejoice in the LORD," to be "joyful in her God." The more we know of God in Christ, the greater will be our spiritual joy, and the less likely we shall be to have that joy disturbed by outward

circumstances. Thus Paul, though sorrowful, yet alway rejoiced: and having nothing, possessed all things (1 Cor. vi. 10).

We will remember thy love more than wine :

It seems to her impossible ever to forget the deep revelations of His love which have just been vouchsafed her. It was Paul's earnest desire that the Ephesian converts might (in common with all saints) be able "to comprehend the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge," that thus they "might be filled with all the fulness of God" (Eph. iii. 18, 19). Were this the prayer of the whole Church, individually and collectively, what blessed results would follow!

The Bride dwells much on that proof of the Saviour's love of which the bruised grape was a symbol. The love existed from all eternity, but was manifested in fullest power on Calvary.

The upright love thee ;

For "he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest that they are wrought in God" (John iii. 21), while "every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved" (John iii. 20).

(or) they love thee uprightly.

"He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1 John ii. 4). "Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity" (2 Tim. ii. 19). "Ye that love the LORD, hate evil" (Ps. xcvi. 10).

Ver. 5. *I am black, but comely, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, as the tents of Kedar, as the curtains of Solomon.*

"I am black as the tents of Kedar." We have Kedar's origin given us in Genesis xxv. 13. He was the son of Ishmael, of whom it was foretold, "He will be a wild man; his hand against every man, and every man's hand against him; and he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren" (Gen. xvi. 12). In the time of David the tribe manifested these characteristics; and thus the troubled king exclaimed, "Woe is me that I sojourn in Mesech, that I dwell in the tents of Kedar! My soul hath long dwelt with him that hateth peace. I am for peace: but when I speak they are for war" (Ps. cxx. 5-7). The Spirit of God reveals the meaning of these passages in Gal. iv. 21-31: "Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law? For it is written, that Abraham had two sons; the one by a bond maid, the other by a free woman. But he of the bond woman was born after the flesh; but he of the free woman by promise. Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar. For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all. For it is written, Rejoice, thou barren that bearest not; break forth and cry, thou that travailest not; for the desolate hath many more children than she which hath an husband. Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise. But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that

was born after the Spirit, even so it is now. Nevertheless what saith the scripture? Cast out the bond woman and her son : for the son of the bond woman shall not be heir with the son of the free woman. So then, brethren, we are not children of the bond woman, but of the free."

The contrast lies between Ishmael (the child of bondage), and Isaac (the child of promise): Kedar (delighting in war), and Solomon (the peaceful king).

As Hagar represented the old, and Sarah the new covenant: so Ishmael the old nature, derived from Adam; Isaac the new, born of God.

David's complaint in Psalm cxx., "Woe is me," etc., corresponds with that of Paul in Romans vii., "I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that I do not; but what I hate, that do I. . . . I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. . . . Now, if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from this body of death?" (*Marg.*)

David could speak of victory in Psalm lxxvi., where, speaking of God dwelling amongst His people, he says, "There brake he the arrows of the bow, the shield, and the sword, and the battle. Thou art more glorious and excellent than the mountains of prey. The stout-hearted are spoiled, they have slept their sleep; and

none of the men of might have found their hands. At thy rebuke, O God of Jacob, both the chariot and horse are cast into a deep sleep."

And Paul has his song of triumph in Romans viii. : "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? God that justifieth? Who is he that condemneth? Christ that died? yea, rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us? Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?"

Oh that the Church would join in this hymn of praise, and "thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord"!

Ishmael, though cast "out," was to "dwell in the presence of his brethren;" for "the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would" (Gal. v. 17). "This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh" (Gal. v. 16).

The Arab-like mode of warfare with which these desires attack us is noticed by Peter, when he warns us to "abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul" (1 Pet. ii. 11), and by James, when he asks "From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?" (James iv. 1, 2.)

The arduous nature of the conflict is implied in the joy with which Paul announces that the time of his departure is at hand; that he has "fought a good



fight," has "finished his course, and has kept the faith" (1 Tim. iv. 6, 7).

A promise of victory is given to the Christian, "for sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace" (Rom. vi. 14).

Let the Bride examine well the carvings on the walls of Solomon's temple: cherubim and palm-trees overlaid with gold (1 Kings vi. 29). The victory is already secured in Christ her salvation;¹ but the time is not yet come for her to grasp the palm in her own hands. Even then the victory will be ascribed to God alone.

"I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, *and palms in their hands*; and cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb" (Rev. vii. 9, 10).²

¹ "Salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks" (Isa. xxvi. 1). "Thou shalt call thy walls Salvation" (Isa. lx. 18).

² Looking upon Kedar (the offspring of the child of bondage) as representing the corrupt lusts of the old nature, the prophecies concerning it are deeply interesting.

The King of Babylon was commanded to "go up to Kedar, and spoil the men of the east." It was foretold that he would "take away their tents and their flocks;" and take to himself "their curtains, and all their vessels, and their camels" (Jer. xlix. 28, 29).

The Babylon of Rev. xvii. xviii. has done to the symbolic Kedar what Nebuchadnezzar did to the literal.

She has "spoiled," repressed, and (to the eye of man) conquered it: but though she makes war upon the lusts of the flesh, and encourages all *outward* crushing of human instincts and passions, she appropriates everything which will tend to her own aggrandizement: and if she does enforce outward morality, it is not that God may be glorified, but that she may "sit a queen," and usurp the place and authority of the "Most High."

Let us guard jealously against any system of theology which

But though the Bride acknowledges and laments that she is by nature "black as the tents of Kedar," she states that she is (through grace) "comely as the curtains of Solomon." These curtains must have been *the veil* (for we read of no curtains since the time of David) *made by Solomon*, "of blue, and purple, and crimson, and fine linen," on which he wrought cherubim (2 Chron. iii. 14). Within this veil was placed the ark, symbol of the Divine presence. Paul tells us this veil represented the flesh of Christ (Heb. x. 20): and when we read in John's Gospel of the Word being made flesh, and tabernacling amongst us, and in Timothy of "God manifest in the flesh," we can enter somewhat into the meaning of the ark within the veil. But does it not seem presumptuous in the Bride to declare that she is comely as this veil? Is she not therein assuming a beauty to which she has no title? True, all she has of her own is the blackness of Kedar's tents; and she dare not of herself compare with the beautiful curtains of Solomon.

would substitute outward morality, or mortification of the flesh, for the "new birth."

Again, "the LORD God of Israel hath spoken" concerning Kedar, "Within a year, according to the years of an hireling, and all the glory of Kedar shall fail; and the residue of the number of archers, the mighty men of the children of Kedar, shall be diminished" (Isa. xxi. 16, 17). This follows immediately the prophecy of the destruction of Babylon, and reminds us forcibly that "the lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down; and the LORD alone shall be exalted in that day" (Isa. ii. 11, 17).

"It is not for us to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power" (Acts i. 7); but there is much comfort in the thought that God's people, now "sorely shot at," "wounded," and even "bound by" Kedar's archers, shall certainly enjoy peace from "fightings within:" that the number of these archers shall be diminished, and those who "draw water out of the wells of salvation" shall be delivered even from their noise.

Amongst the multitudes gathering to the Church in the latter

But what she cannot do, Jehovah does for her ! The righteousness of Christ is indeed hers ; His comeliness is put upon her, and this invests her with a perfect beauty, even in the eyes of the All-seeing. The righteousness is twofold : assumed, and inwrought. Christ puts on her the one ; the Spirit works in her the other. Both have been purchased for her. One is her title to eternal happiness ; the other her preparation to receive it. Both are essential.

What honour was done to these curtains ! Within them was placed the ark wherein was the covenant of the LORD, that He made with the children of Israel ! (2 Chron. vi. 11.) " But will God in very deed dwell with men on the earth ? " *He has done so : and in Him God's Covenant with His people is established.* He has promised to do so again. It is a part of the covenant that He will dwell in the members of His Church, and walk in them ; and will be their God, and they

days, the prophet notes " all the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered together unto thee, the rams of Nebaioth " (another of Ishmael's sons, Gen. xxv. 13) " shall minister unto thee : they shall come up with acceptance on mine altar, and I will glorify the house of my glory " (Isa. lx. 7). In that time (so ardently longed for by the child of God), the good things of this world, after which Kedar lusts, and which he often obtains by violence or fraud, shall be made to minister to God's glory. The wealth, pomp, and splendour which the natural man seeks as his ultimate good, shall then take their proper place in creation (not lords, but servants). These things are not *in themselves* sinful, as the intolerance of some would have us believe. The house of mourning is not *in itself* better than the house of feasting ; or the crown of thorns than the crown of gold. But does it become the Bride to live in pleasure, and frequent the house of feasting, while the Bridegroom is absent ? Is it for the followers of Him who wore the crown of thorns to covet earthly dignities ?

The blood-bought creation shall yet glorify its Redeemer and Lord, and come up with acceptance on His altar : but when will man learn that " *it is the altar which sanctifieth the gift ?* "

shall be His people (2 Cor. vi. 16). In the vision of Christ seen by John in Rev. i. 13, the Alpha and Omega appeared, not isolated from His people, but standing in the midst of the seven Churches, and holding in His hand the ministering spirits of these Churches.

If these things be so, what manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness; looking for and hasting the coming of the day of God! (2 Pet. iii. 11, 12.)

Ver. 6. Look not upon me,

Thus the true Church of Christ may be known. She deprecates all looking at herself. She points ever away from self to Jesus.

Because I am black,

She knows that in her (that is, in her flesh) dwelleth no good thing (Rom. vii. 18). Her language is that of the prophet: "We are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away" (Isa. lxiv. 6).

Because the sun hath looked upon me:

The blackness seems not to have been caused by the sun, but revealed by it. The evil of her nature, the exceeding sinfulness of the "unfruitful works of darkness," have been "made manifest by the light; for whatsoever doth make manifest is light" (Eph. v. 13). She has been in the chambers of the King, and she feels as Isaiah felt when he saw "the Lord sitting upon his throne, high and lifted up." "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I

dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips : for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts " (Isa. vi. 5). It is by communion with Christ we become acquainted with our own nothingness.

My mother's children were angry with me.

We have not far to look for the Bride's origin. She was by nature a child of wrath, even as others (Eph. ii. 3). Her birth and her nativity were of the land of Canaan ; her father was an Amorite, and her mother an Hittite (Ezek. xvi. 3). But she has been adopted into another family, and made the child of God by faith in Christ Jesus (Gal. iii. 26). She is now a " fellow-citizen with the saints, and of the household of God " (Eph. ii. 19). To her the gracious promise has been fulfilled, " As many as received him, to them gave he power to become sons of God " (John i. 12). " She is born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh " (which is, in fact, quite opposed to it), " nor of the will of man, but of God " (John i. 13). Because of this adoption, she is " led by the Spirit of God " (Rom. viii. 14), and henceforth the Spirit of Christ in her heart enables her to call God, " Abba, Father " (Gal. iv. 6). The former relationship has been dissolved by grace. Her Saviour's words, " If any come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple " (Luke xiv. 26), have been received into her heart ; and, first having counted the cost, she is willing to give up all for Him.

The mother's children were angry with her. If she were of the world, the world would love his own : but because she is not of the world, but Christ has chosen

her out of the world, therefore the world hateth her (John xv. 19). The reason why the world knows her not, is, "because it knew him not" (1 John iii. 1). She is but bearing her cross after her Master. In the days of His flesh He too suffered from the "mother's children," who hated Him without a cause (John xv. 25). Thus He laments, "I am become a stranger unto my brethren, and an alien unto my mother's children" (Ps. lxix. 8). "They that hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of mine head : they that would destroy me, being mine enemies wrongfully, are mighty" (Ps. lxix. 4). He who once suffered, and now intercedes for His people, laid before His Father on the night of His betrayal the hatred which His followers endured : "The world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world" (John xvii. 14). Does He plead less fervently now ?

They made me keeper of the vineyards :

Whatever this work might have been, it was servile, though apparently honourable. In this respect it differed from that assigned to the prodigal (Luke xv. 15, 16), which was both servile and degrading. The world, so as she keeps the soul from God, cares little for ought else. Some are kept from Him by "press of business ;" others by "innocent amusements ;" others by "thirst for fame, power, place, or wealth ;" some by following the vilest propensities of their nature. The great object is to keep the prodigal from returning to his Father's house ; the Bride from keeping her vineyard. In part she has succeeded, for in sorrow and shame the Bride adds—

Mine own vineyard have I not kept.

What is the vineyard? She asserts, in Cant. viii. 12, *it is before her*. "Whatsoever our hand findeth to do, let us do it with our might" (Eccles. ix. 10). In the Church of God each member has his place and work, and the Lord of the vineyard has Himself appointed what each is to do. There is one thing certain: if we have a single eye to the glory of God, our work will lie before us, and our eyes will be open to see it. There is no attempt on the part of the Bride to hide her sin, or even to extenuate it. She knows that "the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from *all* sin," and that "if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John i. 7, 9). Therefore she covers them not, but confesses and forsakes them (Prov. xxviii. 13).

Henceforward she will serve the world no longer; for "no man can serve two masters" (Matt. vi. 24), and she has been "bought with a price;" therefore feels she must not be the servant of man (1 Cor. vii. 23). Whatever gain she might have had, she now counts but loss for Christ (Phil. iii. 7). And what would it have profited her to have gained the whole world, and lost her own soul? (Matt. xvi. 26.)

The neglected vineyard is thus described by Solomon: "Lo, it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall thereof was broken down" (Prov. xxiv. 31). In such a state was the city of Jerusalem found by Nehemiah after the Jews were brought captive to Babylon. In such a state was the Church of Jerusalem (the vineyard of the Lord), when Ezra sought to raise it from its fallen, degraded condition. And in what state is the Church of Christ

now? Has not the wall of partition between it and the world been broken down? Has not the deceitfulness of riches (compared by our Saviour to thorns, in the parable of the Sower) crept into it? And are not those who should be its keepers living in the world as if they were of it, and serving it instead of Him they call Master?

Ver. 7. *Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth,*

No need to tell his name. "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee" (Ps. lxxiii. 25). She loves Him, because He first loved her (1 John iv. 19).

Where thou feedest, where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon :

She desires to be identified as His. In the preceding verse she has been regarding Him as the Lord of the vineyard. In this, she looks on Him as the great chief Shepherd. She seeks from Him direction respecting her work. She loves the sheep for the sake of the Shepherd. She loves the children of God because she loves God. She desires spiritual food for herself and them; and she seeks shelter from the temptations of the world, which have so hotly assailed her. There seems to be somewhat of weariness in the question (perhaps even impatience), as if the conflict with the mother's children had been too much for her, and she longs to be where the weary rest from the burden and heat of the day.

For why should I be as one that turneth aside (is veiled) by the flocks of thy companions?

She feels that she *has turned aside*,—that in this servile attempt to please the world and follow its direc-

tions, she has dishonoured her profession, and become as one veiled, *i.e.* not known, not recognised as a child of God. She longs for spiritual communion; to be identified with His people,—to share their privileges, their joys. Of how much has this world-service deprived her! She does well now to lay her heavy trouble before her loving, forgiving, powerful Master.

HIS ANSWER.

Ver. 8. *If thou know not, O thou fairest among women,*

“Dost thou not know? Have I not given thee my Word to lead thee, to keep thee, to talk with thee?” But compromise with the world has blinded her. The want of singleness of eye has prevented her seeing clearly. He addresses her in language expressive of admiration, because He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath He seen perverseness in Israel (Numb. xxiii. 21). Her sins and iniquities He remembers no more (Heb. x. 17).

Go thy way forth by the footsteps of the flock,

He gives her no new command. His direction is simply that of the Heaven-inspired prophet: “Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your soul” (Jer. vi. 16). He bids her not be slothful, but follow them who “through faith and patience inherit the promises” (Heb. vi. 12), to follow them even as they followed Christ (1 Cor. xi. 1).

In the eleventh chapter of Hebrews the apostle points out to us the footsteps of the flock, and entreats us, “seeing we are compassed about with so great a

cloud of witnesses, to lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus."

And feed thy kids beside the shepherd's tents.

The work assigned her is similar to that assigned to Peter by Christ: "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?" "Feed my lambs." "Feed my sheep" (John xxi. 15, 17).

She too has said that she loves Him (ver. 7); and He asks as proof of that love, that she will feed the flock of God that is on earth (1 Pet. v. 2).

In Scripture the word *kid* seems often indiscriminately applied to both the young of the sheep and the young of the goat. It may be that the word *kid* is here used designedly, to show that amongst the flock on earth sheep and goats are mingled. At the last great day the Chief Shepherd will acknowledge as His the sheep only.¹ In Scripture, when Jesus is represented as feed-

¹ In the parable (Matt. xxv. 31-46) the King is represented as recognising His sheep by the very marks given by Himself in John x. 27. "*My sheep hear my voice,*"—"they follow me." "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. *By this shall all know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another*" (John xiii. 34, 35). By this mark He distinguishes them at the last day. The beloved disciple points out the same evidence of belonging to Christ: "Every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God." He gives the example of Christ's love, to be followed by His disciples, and adds, "If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and His love is perfected in us" (1 John iv. 7-12). He also notes the mark of the goats, "He that loveth not, knoweth not God; for God is love" (ver. 8). We must guard against considering this love a species of good works. It is not because of good works the King receives them, but because His Spirit dwells in them, and therefore they are His. *Their love proved their faith to be genuine.* In this parable, it seems with the professing Church only that Christ is dealing.

ing His people, the people are called "*sheep*" or "*lambs*." Here, where the Bride is given the charge, they are called "kids."

The Bride is not given choice of pasture-ground. She is directed to feed the kids "beside the Shepherd's tents." There is abundance of green pasture in the Word of God, and if Jehovah be our shepherd we "shall not want" (Ps. xxiii.), even though we may be far removed from Christian ordinances; but in no part of Scripture does the Spirit of God authorize our *slighting* or *neglecting* the means of grace He has Himself appointed. "Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man," even "unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ," He, the great Head of the Church, has given "some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (Eph. iv. 11-13). The flocks must all be fed in the same pasture; for Paul says, "Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed" (Gal. i. 8, 9).

All are not shepherds who call themselves such; for Paul warns the elders of Ephesus that even of themselves should men arise, "speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them" (Acts xx. 30). And Ezekiel denounces shepherds of Israel who fed themselves and neglected the flock. He accuses them not only of having enriched themselves at the expense of those whom they were bound to watch over and protect, but even of tampering with the Word of God in utter

wantonness and cruelty. "Seemeth it a small thing unto you to have eaten up the good pasture" (appropriated to yourselves the precious promises), "but ye must tread down with your feet the residue of your pastures? and to have drunk of the deep waters, but ye must foul the residue with your feet?" (Ezek. xxxiv. 18.) The infallible Word points out how we may distinguish true shepherds from false: "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isa. viii. 20). "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world. Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is of God" (1 John iv. 1, 2).

Our Saviour tells us we shall know them by their fruits (Matt. vii. 15, 16), and Paul warns us to mark those whose walk denoted them to be followers (as he was) of Christ. "Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample; . . . for our conversation is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Phil. iii. 17, 20).

Observe, the shepherds are spoken of as dwelling in tents. They are but sojourners here, and "look for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Heb. xi. 9, 10). Their office too is temporary. They but hold it till He comes whose right it is; when all the flocks shall be gathered together, "and there shall be one fold and one shepherd" (John x. 16); for God will set up one Shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even his servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd (Ezek. xxxiv. 23).

Ver. 9. *I have compared thee, O my love, to a company of horses in Pharaoh's chariots.*

The comparison is Christ's, not hers. We read in 2 Chron. i. 16, 17, that "Solomon had horses brought *out of Egypt*." "And they fetched up and brought forth *out of Egypt*, a chariot for six hundred shekels of silver, and an horse for an hundred and fifty." The prominent idea is *Redemption*. These horses were bought at a great price; and "ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ" (1 Pet. i. 18, 19). They were fetched and brought up by Solomon *out of Egypt*. "In time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience; among whom also we all had our conversation in times past, in the lusts of the flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us (even when we were dead in sins), hath quickened us together with Christ" (Eph. ii. 2-7). "Ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord; walk as children of light" (Eph. v. 8).

We have a glowing description of the horse given in Job xxxix. 19-25. Jehovah asks, "Hast thou given the horse strength? hast thou clothed his neck with thunder? canst thou make him afraid as a grasshopper? the glory of his nostrils is terrible. He paweth in the valley, and rejoiceth in strength: he goeth on to meet

the armed men. He mocketh at fear, and is not affrighted; neither turneth he back from the sword. The quiver rattleth against him, the glittering spear and the shield. He swalloweth the ground with fierceness and rage; neither believeth he that it is the sound of the trumpet. He saith among the trumpets, Ha, ha! and he smelleth the battle afar off, the thunder of the captains, and the shouting."

These noble qualities, strength, courage, ardour, devoted zeal, once used in the service of Pharaoh, are now used in the service of Solomon. There is much force in the expression, "the glory of his nostrils is terrible." Is it not the breath of life breathed into the Christian by the Spirit which makes him terrible, and enables him to overcome, and to be more than conqueror through Him that loved us? The Church of God having the promise of almighty strength in Jesus, may go forward fearlessly to her spiritual conflict, rejoicing even in the sound of the battle, if thus her Master may be glorified. In olden times how have the people of God fought and conquered! Time would fail to tell of all who "through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens" (Heb. xi. 32-40). Truly in those times the Church of Christ might well have been compared to a company of horses in Pharaoh's chariots!

And now should not each member of Christ's Church use all the powers God has bestowed on him, for the furtherance of Christ's kingdom? Should not the redeemed ones be employed in drawing the chariot of the

Prince of Peace? Should not they, as one man, strive together for the faith of the gospel, and while waging war on sin, proclaim peace through the blood?

The world asks in scorn, "Where is the promise of Christ's coming?" It is time for the Church to put forth all her energies, and with her various members united in the bond of love, animated by one Divine Spirit, to go forward in holy boldness, bearing everywhere the message of salvation, and thus hastening the coming of her Lord.¹ In the latter days, we are told, "there shall be upon the bells (*marg.* bridles) of the horses, HOLINESS UNTO THE LORD" (Zech. xiv. 20). Beautiful promise, indicating that the horses in the chariot of Solomon the Prince of Peace shall never then turn aside from the great highway, the way of holiness!² *The Gospel message whose sound is to go forth into all the world, is not mere forgiveness of sin, but salvation from sin.*

The King calls these horses "*a company*;" but when the redeemed are gathered together they are "a great multitude which no man could number" (Rev. vii. 9).

Ver. 10. *Thy cheeks are comely with rows of jewels,*

These jewels are described by Peter: "Whose adorning, let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; but let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price"

¹ "Looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God" (2 Pet. iii. 12); *marg. reading.*

² "And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called, The way of holiness" (Isa. xxxv. 8).

(1 Pet. iii. 3, 4); and by Paul in 1 Timothy ii. 9, 10 : "In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety ; not with broidered hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array ; but (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works."

Thus is the Bride adorned ; and these ornaments, as well as the chain of gold, have been put on her by the King. "I decked thee also with ornaments, and I put bracelets upon thine hands, and a chain on thy neck" (Ezek. xvi. 11). *The rows of jewels are from their position invisible to herself* : but the King notices and approves them. They make her cheeks comely. Paul observes, they "become women professing godliness ;" and Peter testifies, that "they are in the sight of God of great price." Surely the unity of the Spirit in the word may here be plainly seen !

Thy neck with chains of gold.

The jewels she may not see. Were she to do so she would have to remove them from where the King has placed them, and run the risk of losing them altogether. It is not exactly so with the chains of gold. These she is indeed ordered to "bind about her neck," to "bind continually upon her heart, to tie about her neck" (Prov. iii. 3, vi. 21); but they can be seen and felt by her, though she may not remove them.

Solomon tells us what these chains of gold are : "My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother ; for they shall be an ornament of grace unto thy head, and chains about thy neck" (Prov. i. 8, 9). "My son, forget not my law ; but let thine heart keep my commandments : for length of days,

and long life, and peace shall they add to thee. Let not mercy and truth forsake thee ; bind them about thy neck ; write them upon the table of thine heart" (Prov. iii. 1-3.) "My son, keep thy father's commandment, and forsake not the law of thy mother ; bind them continually upon thine heart, tie them about thy neck" (Prov. vi. 20, 21). It is worthy of notice that the commandment and instruction of the father is *the law of the mother*. The commands of God—"holy, just, and good" (Rom. vii. 12)—are indeed the law of "the Jerusalem which is above," and "which is the mother of us all" (Gal. iv. 26). In the new covenant these commands are not a yoke of bondage, but chains about our neck. "For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel, after those days, saith the Lord ; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts ; and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people" (Heb. viii. 10). To all the subjects of the "new birth" the law of God is a delight. Before conversion their consciences testified that it was good, even though their corrupt nature hated it. Now that they have received the Spirit of adoption, they are led by the Spirit of God in the steps of their beloved Master, who perfectly fulfilled the law in all its length and breadth, and who urged on all His disciples to reverence and obey it.¹ The spirit of the new covenant,

¹ In the Sermon on the Mount, where our Saviour opens out the laws by which His kingdom of righteousness, and peace, and joy would be governed, He takes the moral law, and breathing into it His divine Spirit of Love, He not only proves the impossibility of any man being able to keep the law (in his natural state), but also shows what manner of persons His followers should become, through the leading of the Spirit. These are solemn words, "Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall

Love, is indeed the fulfilling of the moral law. As John testified, it was not a new commandment, but an old : the old commandment which they had heard from the beginning (1 John ii. 7). If this new covenant law of Love were imprinted on each heart by the Spirit, and bound continually on the neck of each member of Christ's Church, how certainly would we "find favour and good success in the sight of God and man" (Prov. iii. 4).

Ver. 11. *We will make thee borders of gold, with studs of silver.*

It is the Triune God (He who said, "*Let us make man in our image*") who speaks, and promises to the Bride a future, such as man's finite mind can scarcely grasp. It is remarkable how frequently Solomon associates gold and silver with wisdom and understanding. "My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee ; so that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding ; yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding ; *if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as hid treasures ; then shalt thou understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God.* For the LORD giveth wisdom : out

teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven ; but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees" (the form without the spirit), "ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. v. 19, 20). Paul, in exhorting the converts to love (the fulfilling of the law), mentions many of the commandments, and adds "*if there be any other*" (showing that he held them all as binding), "it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Rom. xiii. 8, 9).

of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding" (Prov. ii. 1-6). "Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding: for the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold" (Prov. iii. 13, 14). "Receive my instruction, and not silver; and knowledge rather than choice gold." "My fruit is better than gold, yea, than fine gold; and my revenue than choice silver" (Prov. viii. 10, 19). "How much better is it to get wisdom than gold? and to get understanding, rather to be chosen than silver" (Prov. xvi. 16).

In that magnificent chapter of Job, beginning "Surely there is a vein for the silver, and a place for gold where they fine it,"—the question is asked, "But where shall wisdom be found? and where is the place of understanding? Man knoweth not the price thereof; neither is it found in the land of the living. The depth saith, It is not in me; and the sea saith, It is not in me. It cannot be gotten for gold, neither shall silver be weighed for the price thereof. It cannot be valued with the gold of Ophir, with the precious onyx, or the sapphire. The gold and the crystal cannot equal it; and the exchange of it shall not be for jewels of fine gold. No mention shall be made of coral, or of pearls: for the price of wisdom is above rubies. The topaz of Ethiopia shall not equal it, neither shall it be valued with pure gold. Whence then cometh wisdom? and where is the place of understanding?" (Job xxviii. 12-20.)

The abundance of gold and silver in the kingdom of Solomon is frequently mentioned. In 1 Kings x. 21 we are told, "All king Solomon's drinking-vessels were

of gold, and all the vessels of the house of the forest of Lebanon, pure gold; none were of silver: it was nothing accounted of in the days of Solomon." In 2 Chron. i 15 we read that "the king made silver and gold at Jerusalem as plenteous as stones," and these statements are repeated in 2 Chron. ix. 20, 27.

As silver and gold abounded in the kingdom of Solomon, so shall wisdom and understanding abound in the reign of Solomon's great Antitype.

Hear what Job and Solomon say respecting this wisdom, and then seek to enter into the magnificence of God's purposes with regard to His people. "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; and the knowledge of the holy is understanding" (Prov. ix. 10). "Whence cometh wisdom? and where is the place of understanding? Seeing it is hid from the eyes of all living, and kept close from the fowls of the air. Destruction and death say, We have heard the fame thereof with our ears. God understandeth the way thereof, and he knoweth the place thereof. For he looketh to the ends of the earth, and seeth under the whole heaven; to make the weight for the winds; and he weigheth the waters by measure. When he made a decree for the rain, and a way for the lightning of the thunder; then did he see it, and declare it; he prepared it, yea, and searched it out. And unto man he said, *Behold, the fear of the LORD, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding*" (Job xxviii. 20-28).

This wisdom and understanding, found with such difficulty here, shall be common to all in the reign of the Prince of Peace. "They shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying,



Know the LORD : for all shall know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD : for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more" (Jer. xxxi. 34, quoted as a portion of the new covenant, Heb. viii. 11). "All thy children shall be taught of the LORD ; and great shall be the peace of thy children" (Isa. liv. 13). To this prophecy our Saviour alluded when He said, "It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God" (John vi. 45). True wisdom cometh down from above, and can be taught by God alone, for He only "understandeth the way thereof, and knoweth the place thereof."

Again, Isaiah says, "The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea" (Isa. xi. 9), and the same glorious truth is repeated in Habakkuk in almost similar words (Hab. ii. 14).

"Wisdom and knowledge shall be the stability of thy times, and strength of salvation ; the fear of the LORD is his treasure" (Isa. xxxiii. 6).

How clearly does our Saviour's statement in **John** vi. 45 show that Father, Son, and Spirit are engaged in bringing about this wonderful state of things ! "Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me." And how appropriate, that in pledging His word to this making of all things new,—this regeneration,—Jehovah should, as at the first creation, use the word **WE** !

Let us contrast *the few*, searching in the depths of the earth for the perishable gold and silver of this world ; with *all*, filled with heavenly wisdom ; *all*, taught of God ; *all*, fearing Him !

Let us consider the toil, the weariness of *the few*,

who with *much labour* have attained a *little* earthly wisdom, earthly knowledge; and then let us try to realize *all* (the meanest intellect, as well as the greatest), knowing as they are known, *filled with all the fulness of God!*¹

Our feeble minds cannot comprehend, but may grace be given us to believe it!

Ver. 12. *While the King sitteth at his table, my spikenard sendeth forth the smell thereof.*

The glorious time promised in the preceding verse is still future. "We see not yet all things put under Christ" (Heb. ii. 8), but we do see Him crowned with glory and honour: a king awaiting his kingdom. The time is that of Ps. cx. 1, when "the LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool." While He is thus seated, it is for the Bride to cause her spikenard to send forth its smell. The circumstances here mentioned suggest at once the incident mentioned in Luke vii. 37-50,² respect-

¹ Observe, *it is the Church itself* which is to be made by the Triune God, "borders of gold with studs of silver."

² "And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster-box of ointment, and stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment. Now when the Pharisee, which had bidden him, saw it, he spake within himself, saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him; for she is a sinner. And Jesus answering, said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And he saith, Master, say on. There was a certain creditor which had two debtors; the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most? Simon answered and said, I suppose that he to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged. And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I

ing the woman that was a sinner : and that recorded in Matthew, Mark, and John, respecting Mary of Bethany.

The penitent sinner and the favoured disciple have the same way of proving gratitude. One poured on Jesus' feet alone ; the other on both head and feet, breaking the box that the ointment might flow. On the one occasion the Pharisee blames the Saviour's leniency to the sinner ; on the other, the disciples murmur at the waste. Yet the sin in one case is not

entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet : but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest me no kiss : but this woman, since the time I came in, hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint : but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment. Wherefore, I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven ; for she loved much : but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little. And he saith unto her, Thy sins are forgiven. And they that sat at meat with him began to say within themselves, Who is this that forgiveth sins also ? And he saith to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee ; go in peace."

The anointing of Jesus by Mary of Bethany took place just before His last passover, and is thus recorded by Matthew, Mark, and John :—

"Now, when Jesus was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper, there came unto him a woman having an alabaster-box of very precious ointment, and poured it on his head, as he sat at meat. But when his disciples saw it, they had indignation, saying, To what purpose is this waste ? For this ointment might have been sold for much, and given to the poor. When Jesus understood it, he said unto them, Why trouble ye the woman ? for she hath wrought a good work upon me. For ye have the poor always with you ; but me ye have not always. For in that she hath poured this ointment on my body ; she did it for my burial. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her" (Matt. xxvi. 6-13).

Mark tells it in a very similar manner :—

"And being in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at meat, there came a woman having an alabaster-box of ointment of spikenard, very precious ; and she brake the box, and poured it on his head. And there were some that had indignation within themselves, and said, Why was this waste of the ointment

beyond His power to forgive : the gift in the other is not too precious for Him to receive.

It is THE LOVE He sees : and its value in His eyes is shown in Cant. viii. 7 : " If a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned."

While our King sits at His table, let us, as we have opportunity, prove our love to Him by ministering to the members of His mystical body on earth. " Pure religion, and undefiled, before God and the Father, is this,

made? For it might have been sold for more than three hundred pence, and have been given to the poor. And they murmured against her. And Jesus said, Let her alone ; why trouble ye her? she hath wrought a good work on me. For ye have the poor with you always, and whensoever ye will ye may do them good : but me ye have not always. She hath done what she could : she is come aforehand to anoint my body to the burying. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her" (Mark xiv. 3-9).

John records it thus :—

"Then Jesus, six days before the passover, came to Bethany, where Lazarus was which had been dead, whom he raised from the dead. There they made him a supper ; and Martha served : but Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with him. Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair : *and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment.* Then saith one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, which should betray him, Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor? Then said Jesus, Let her alone : against the day of my burying hath she kept this. For the poor always ye have with you ; but me ye have not always" (John xii. 1-8).

The New Testament abounds with passages showing that acts of kindness to the people of Christ are considered as done to Him. Now that the Head of the Church is exalted, we have no way of proving our love, but by showing kindness to the members of His Church on earth. The gifts sent to Paul were valued by him solely on this account. He calls them "an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God" (Phil. iv. 18). *When shall we act as if we believed that every child of God is a member of Christ's body?*

To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, to keep himself unspotted from the world" (James i. 27). And be assured, "God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed towards his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints" (Heb. vi. 10).

Ver. 13. *A bundle of myrrh is my well-beloved unto me ;*

A bundle, denoting abundance. "For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell" (Col. i. 19). "In him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily" (Col. ii. 9). "God gave not the Spirit by measure unto him" (John iii. 34). This abundance dwells in Him for her, His Bride. "Of his fulness have all we received" (John i. 16).

"*Myrrh*" was used for *preservation*. John tells us that it embalmed the body of Jesus. "There came also Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night, and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound weight. Then took they the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes with the spices" (John xix. 39, 40). It was emblematic of the Divine power by which the body of Jesus was kept uncorrupted while lying in the grave. "Therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad ; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope : because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, *neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.*" This spake David of the resurrection of Christ, "that his soul was not left in hell, *neither his flesh did see corruption*" (Acts ii. 25-31, quoted from Ps. xvi. 10).

By the same power the Bride is kept. "Blessed be

the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which, according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again unto a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, *who are kept by the power of God* through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Pet. i. 3-5). "*His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises; that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust*" (2 Pet. i. 3, 4). He "*is able to keep*" us "*from falling*, and to present us faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy" (Jude 24). Not one member of Christ's mystical body can ever perish. "Whosoever liveth and believeth in me *shall never die*" (John xi. 26). "I give unto them eternal life" ("the gifts and calling of God are without repentance," Romans xi. 29); "*and they shall never perish*, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand" (John x. 28). So confident did Paul feel on this subject, that he declared, "*And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen*" (2 Tim. iv. 18).

"*Myrrh*" was used for *purification*. We read of the manner in which Esther was fitted to appear before the King: "So were the days of their purification accomplished, six months with oil of myrrh, and six months with sweet odours, and with things for the purifying of the women" (Esther xi. 12). Thus the Bride is puri-

fied. "*Every man that hath this hope in him*" (the hope of seeing the King, as a reference to the preceding verse will show¹) "purifieth himself, even as he is pure" (1 John iii. 4). "Ye are washed, ye are sanctified, ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor. vi. 11).

"*Myrrh*" was used in the holy anointing oil for consecrating the vessels of the sanctuary (Exod. xxx. 23-31.) "Take of pure myrrh five hundred shekels," etc. After giving the exact quantity of each ingredient, it was added, "Thou shalt anoint the tabernacle of the congregation therewith, and the ark of the testimony, and the table and all his vessels, and the candlestick and his vessels, and the altar of incense, and the altar of burnt-offerings with all his vessels, and the laver and his foot. And thou shalt sanctify them, that they may be most holy."

In Christ, each member of His Church is consecrated, and set apart as holy. "In a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonour." Amongst His professed followers will at the last day be found some to dishonour; but the apostle goes on to say, "If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, prepared unto every good work. Flee therefore youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart" (2 Tim. ii. 20-22).

¹ "Beloved, now are we the sons of God; and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure" (1 John iii. 2, 3).

We are told that in the last days all vessels shall be set apart for the Lord's service. "The pots in the LORD's house shall be like the bowls before the altar. Yea, every pot in Jerusalem and in Judah shall be holiness unto the LORD of hosts" (Zech. xiv. 20, 21). "Know that *the LORD hath set apart* him that is godly for himself" (Ps. iv. 3). The same ointment which consecrated the vessels of the sanctuary also consecrated the priests: "And thou shalt anoint *Aaron and his sons*, and consecrate them, that they may minister unto me in the priest's office" (Exod. xxx. 30). In Christ the members of His mystical body the Church are, as living stones, "built up a spiritual house, *an holy priesthood*, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ." "Ye are a chosen generation, *a royal priesthood*, an holy nation, a peculiar (purchased) people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light" (1 Pet. ii. 5, 9). Christ sets apart His people for Himself: "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit" (John xv. 16). They are spoken of as *anointed* in Him. "Now he which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God" (2 Cor. i. 21). "Ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things." "But *the anointing which ye have received of him* abideth in you; and ye need not that any man teach you; but as *the same anointing teacheth you* of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him" (1 John ii. 20, 27).

Thus *in Christ*, as the "*bundle of myrrh*," the Church (individually and collectively) *sees her consecration, her*

purification, and her preservation. Can we wonder at her resolve?

He shall lie all night betwixt my breasts.

And what is His gracious answer? "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the age" (Matt. xxvii. 20); that is, all through the night of time, up to the very dawn of everlasting day, when faith will give place to sight, and hope to unutterable enjoyment.

By examining the dangers of the night we may more clearly understand why the presence of Christ (for *consecration, purification, and preservation*), is so **much** needed by His people.

Night is a time—

Of watching: ("I am set in my ward whole nights," Isa. xxi. 8).

Of fear: ("Every man hath his sword upon his thigh, because of fear in the night," Cant. iii. 8).

Of darkness: ("The night is far spent: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness," Rom. xiii. 12. "The darkness he called Night," Gen. i. 5).

Of stumbling: ("If a man walk in the night, he stumbleth," John xi. 10).

Of longing desire: ("With my soul have I desired thee in the night," Isa. xxvi. 9).

Of weariness: ("The king passed the night fasting, his sleep went from him.")

And sleeplessness: ("On that night could not the king sleep," Dan. vi. 18, and Esther vi. 1).

Of restlessness, solitude, and sorrow: ("When I lie down I say, When shall I arise, and the night be gone? and I am full of tossings to and fro unto the dawning of the day," Job vii. 4).

Of fruitless toil : (" Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing," Luke v. 5).

Of sin and temptation : (" The murderer rising with the light, killeth the poor and needy, and in the night is as a thief. The eye also of the adulterer waiteth for the twilight, saying, No eye shall see me : and disguiseth his face. In the dark they dig through houses which they had marked for themselves in the day-time : they know not the light," Job xxiv. 14-16).

Of weeping : (" All the night make I my bed to swim ; I water my couch with my tears," Ps. vi. 6. " Weeping may endure for a night," Ps. xxx. 5).

For prayer : (" He continued all night in prayer to God," Luke vi. 12).

For death : (" The night cometh, when no man can work," John ix. 4).

A time when the world is sunk in sloth, or engaged in revelry : (" For they that sleep, sleep in the night ; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night," 1 Thess. v. 7).

A time when Christ's servants should watch, during the entire length of its four watches : " even, midnight, cock-crowing, and morning " (Mark xiii. 35).

At all these times the Bride declares the myrrh shall lie betwixt her breasts.

His position with regard to her is that which John occupied with Him : " Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved " (John xiii. 23-25).

It is a sign of a Church leaving her first love when she seeks to alter that position, and holds not the Head. Christ should ever have the first place in her affections,

the most honourable position she can give Him, next her heart.

The Son is in the bosom of the Father : ("The only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father," John i. 18).

The Church is in the bosom of Christ : ("Aaron shall bear the names of the children of Israel in the breast-plate of judgment upon his heart, when he goeth in unto the holy place, for a memorial before the LORD continually," Exod. xxviii. 29. "Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, the figures of the true ; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us," Heb. ix. 24).

Christ is in the bosom of the Church : for, "A bundle of myrrh is my well-beloved unto me ; he shall lie all night betwixt my breasts."

Thus is the prayer of our Saviour answered : "I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one" (John xvii. 23). "Ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's" (1 Cor. iii. 23).

Observe the words, "*a bundle* : " a quantity *unlimited*. "Whosoever hath to him shall be given, and he shall have *more abundance*" (Matt. xiii. 12).

More of Christ should be our constant prayer for ourselves and others ! And if we want to send forth the fragrance of Christ in every place : if we desire that a sweet savour of Him should pervade our homes, our neighbourhood, everywhere we move, let us press *the myrrh* more closely to our heart, that our very garments¹ may be saturated with its perfume, and that

¹ "All thy garments smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia, out of the ivory palaces, whereby they have made thee glad" (Ps. xlv. 8).

even the atmosphere around us may breathe of Him. Let everything we think, and say, and do, bear witness that our well-beloved is to us *a bundle of myrrh lying at all times betwixt our breasts.*

Ver. 14. *My beloved is unto me a cluster of camphire in the vineyards of En-gedi.*

What is this camphire? It must be something prized by the King, for it is one of the plants in His garden. "Thy plants are an orchard of pomegranates, with pleasant fruits; camphire, with spikenard; spike-nard and saffron" (Cant. iv. 13, 14).

It is not plain whether it is the Bride who is to the King, or the King who is to the Bride, a cluster of camphire. The vineyards of En-gedi must have been situated in the wilderness where David took refuge from his persecutor Saul, and where he showed that divine spirit of forgiveness suitable to the follower of Him who David afterwards declared "forgiveth all mine iniquities." David, in the warfare forced upon him while waiting his promised kingdom, was pre-eminently a type both of Christ in His weary sojourn on earth, and of the Church of Christ in its present state of warfare.

It might be that the cluster of camphire was to Christ an earnest of the fruitfulness of the garden enclosed; but it suits better with the time of the preceding verses (where Christ as a King sits at His table) to understand it as something He is to the Bride. Some light is thrown on the vineyards in the wilderness, by the promise, in Hosea (ii. 14, 15): "Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably to her (*marg. speak*

to her heart). And I will give her her vineyards from thence."

The meaning of En-gedi is "the fountain of the kid." Perhaps while feeding her kids beside the shepherd's tents, duty brings her amongst the rugged precipices of En-gedi! How sweet to feel that, even in the most dangerous and inhospitable situations, she has earnestness of the Saviour's love; that her beloved is near to breathe into her heart feelings of peace, and that His presence with her is but a pledge that this "wilderness shall rejoice and blossom as the rose." For it is promised that waters of life shall flow to Engedi, that fishers (fishers of men as were the apostles¹) shall there spread forth nets (the Gospel net which gathereth of every kind²), and the fish shall be exceeding many.³

Ver. 15. *Behold, thou art fair, my love (companion);*

"Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it; *that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word; that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any*

¹ "And Jesus saith unto Simon, Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men" (Luke v. 10).

² "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away" (Matt. xiii. 47, 48).

³ "These waters issue out toward the east country, and go down into the desert, and go into the sea; which being brought forth into the sea, the water shall be healed. And it shall come to pass, that every thing that liveth, which moveth, whithersoever the rivers shall come, shall live; and there shall be a very great multitude of fish, *because these waters shall come thither*: for they shall be healed; and every thing shall live whither the river cometh. And it shall come to pass, that the fishers shall stand upon it, from *En-gedi* even unto En-eglaim; they shall be a place to spread forth nets; their fish shall be according to their kinds, as the fish of the great sea, exceeding many" (Ezek. xlvii. 8-10).

such thing ; but that it should be holy, and without blemish" (Eph. v. 25-27).

He calls her His love, or companion. She had asked to be amongst His companions in verse 7, and the request is granted : "Henceforth I call you not servants, for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth : but I have called you *friends* ; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you" (John xv. 15). In Cant. viii. 13 we read that the companions hearken to Christ's voice : and in John xv. 14 we are told that Christ counts those His friends who do whatsoever He commands them.

Behold, thou art fair ; thou hast doves' eyes.

It is to this mark of beauty He would specially call attention : this, He specially commends—her "doves' eyes." The dove is represented in Scripture as mourning. Thus Hezekiah says, "I did mourn as a dove : mine eyes fail with looking upward" (Isa. xxxviii. 14). And Isaiah, speaking of the Church's desolation, declares "We mourn sore like doves ; we look for judgment, but there is none ; for salvation, but it is far off from us" (Isa. lix. 11). Ezekiel also, in describing the grief of the remnant, says, "They that escape of them shall escape, and shall be on the mountains like doves of the valleys, all of them mourning, every one for his iniquity" (Ezek. vii. 16).

This mourning for sin, and especially when combined with looking upward to God for aid, is pleasing in His sight. To such is given these words of comfort : "Blessed are they that mourn : for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the poor in spirit : for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. v. 3, 4).

Again, we have the dove looking toward the ark, finding no rest on earth for the sole of her foot, till signs of the renewal of the condemned world appear; like the troubled child of God, who when the waters rage and swell looks steadily unto Jesus, and gratefully accepts the inspired invitation of the apostle—"And to you who are troubled, rest with us" (2 Thess. i. 7).

But the dove is, above all, the emblem of the Spirit of God.¹ And the dove's eyes are the spiritual discernment which is bestowed on God's children.

"Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he that is spiritual discerneth all things, yet he himself is discerned of no man" (1 Cor. ii. 9-15).

¹ "And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him" (Matt. iii. 16). All the Evangelists mention this. Luke says, "in a bodily shape like a dove" (Luke iii. 22).

This spiritual discernment may be much marred by seeking to please the world, or by allowing anything to attract our attention from Christ.

"The light of the body is the eye : if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light : but if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness !" (Matt. vi. 22, 23.) Again, James tells us that "a double-minded man is unstable in all his ways" (James i. 8) ; and John, that want of love causes a man to be in darkness, to walk in darkness, and to know not whither he goeth, because *that darkness* (the want of love) hath blinded his eyes (1 John ii. 11).

Ver. 16. *Behold, thou art fair, my beloved, yea, pleasant ;*

The Bride is not in the flesh, but in the Spirit ; for "they that are in the flesh cannot please God" (Rom. viii. 8, 9). The singleness of eye commended in the preceding verse causes her walk to be such as pleases Him. Thus Paul prayed for the Colossians, "For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding ; that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God" (Col. i. 9, 10). And thus he warned the Thessalonians : "Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more" (1 Thess. iv. 1).

Also our bed is green.

This bed seems not to refer to the green pastures where the flock rest, but to "the valley of the shadow of death." Thus Isaiah says of the righteous, "They shall rest in their beds" (Isa. lvii. 2). And Paul speaks of their *sleep*: "For if we believe that Jesus died, and rose again, even so them also which *sleep in Jesus* will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord, shall not prevent them which *are asleep*" (1 Thess. iv. 14, 15). He is with His people when entering this sleep: therefore He says, "*our bed*." David realized this when he said, "If I make my bed in hades, behold, thou art there" (Ps. cxxxix. 8). And this bed, this resting after the toil and burden of the day, this lying down, this putting off the body, as one would lay aside the working-clothes when work is over, is "*green*"—not a dark, gloomy passage to another world, but a green valley in which we lie down, and awake to be with Jesus.

Mourner, think of this. The bed is green because the Son of Man lay there. *It speaks to us now of resurrection.* Jesus said, "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth, and believeth in me, shall never die" (John xi. 25, 26).

For every member of Christ's body the sting of death has been removed, therefore can we say of them, "Thy dead shall live, my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust: for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead" (Isa. xxvi. 19).

The words, "*our bed is green*," do not *speak* of victory ; though *that* is implied ; for victory is associated with warfare, and tumult, and noise : and they speak of repose, and peace, and calm. The victory was won long ago in that fierce struggle between the Captain of our Salvation and the great adversary, when the Prince of Life submitted to death, in order that He might "through death destroy him that had the power of death, and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage" (Heb. ii. 14, 15). They speak of sleep in Jesus, rest with Jesus, the unclothing of that which is imperishable, in order that it "may be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven" (2 Cor. v. 2).

"May the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant," cause each mourner in Zion to enter into the fulness of comfort conveyed in these words, "also *our bed is green*."

These two verses (the 15th and 16th) might be taken as an epitome of the Christian's life. In verse 15 the child of God is seen united to Jesus, and beheld by the all-seeing eye of Jehovah as complete in Him,—fair, without spot or blemish. He has opened the eyes of her understanding (for whereas she was blind, now she sees), and shown her her state by nature, and the free salvation which is in Christ Jesus ; and He has still further enlightened her that she "may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints" (Eph. i. 18).

In verse 16 we see her walking with God, and are shown with what delight He contemplates the work of the Spirit in her, transforming her by the renewing of

her mind, that she "may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Rom. xii. 2). We have reason to believe that this work of sanctification (which is indeed the working out of God's will in us by His Spirit) is watched over by Jehovah with a pleasure we cannot conceive. It, as well as the justification of the sinner, redounds to His everlasting praise and glory. Then we see the Christian, when her walk with God on earth is ended, calmly resting on the green bed of God's promises in Christ,—so fresh, so soothing, so bright; so strong, that we need never fear they will give way beneath us; green, as the tenderest pasture; firm, and steadfast, and true, as the Rock of Ages; ever new, and ever renewed to each child of God; for "so He giveth His beloved sleep." "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee; because he trusteth in thee. Trust ye in the LORD for ever; for in the LORD JEHOVAH (the Rock of Ages) is everlasting strength."

Ver. 17. *The beams of our house are cedar, and our rafters of fir.*

We have in 1 Kings v. the account of the manner in which these beams and rafters were got ready for the place they were intended to occupy—a place of high honour, seeing that the house was to be the dwelling-place of the Most High. Solomon sent to Hiram, king of Tyre (who was ever a lover of David), saying:—"Thou knowest how that David my father could not build an house unto the name of the LORD his God, for the wars which were about him on every side, *until the LORD put them under the soles of his feet*. But now the LORD my God hath given me rest on every side, so that

there is neither adversary nor evil occurrent. And, behold, I purpose to build an house unto the name of the LORD my God, as the LORD spake unto David my father, saying, Thy son, whom I will set upon thy throne in thy room, he shall build an house unto my name. Now therefore command thou that they *hew me cedar-trees out of Lebanon* ; and my servants shall be with thy servants : and unto thee will I give hire for thy servants, according to all that thou shalt appoint : for thou knowest that there is not among us any that can skill to hew timber like unto the Sidonians. And Hiram sent to Solomon, saying, I have considered the things which thou sentest to me for : and I will do all thy desire concerning *timber of cedar*, and concerning *timber of fir*. My servants shall bring them down from Lebanon unto the sea ; and I will convey them by sea in floats unto the place that thou shalt appoint me, and will cause them to be discharged there, and thou shalt receive them : and thou shalt accomplish my desire in giving food for my household. So Hiram gave Solomon *cedar-trees*, and *fir-trees*, according to all his desire " (1 Kings v. 2-10).

The place these beams of cedar and fir occupied is given in 1 Kings vi. 9, 10, 15, 16 :—" So he " (Solomon) " built the house, and finished it ; and covered the house with *beams and boards of cedar*. And he built chambers against all the house five cubits high ; and they rested on the house with *timber of cedar*." " And he built the walls of the house within with *boards of cedar*, both the floor of the house, and the walls of the ceiling : he covered on the inside with wood, and covered the floor of the house with *planks of fir*. And he built twenty cubits on the sides of the house, both the floor and the

walls with *boards of cedar* : he even built them for it within, for the oracle, for the most holy."

This house was afterwards destroyed by fire ; but the temple which it prefigured—the temple of Christ's body¹—could not be destroyed ; and to His mystical body the Church, now in process of building, is given the promise that the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.²

The Church of Christ is "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone ; in whom all the building, fitly framed together, groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord, in whom ye also are builded together, for an habitation of God through the Spirit" (Eph. ii. 20-22).

"Ye are the temple of the living God ; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them ; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (2 Cor. vi. 16).

The cedars of Lebanon are in the Old Testament frequently compared to the people of God. They are called "goodly cedars," or "cedars of God" (Ps. lxxx. 10.) "Trees of the LORD, which he hath planted, and which are full of sap" (Ps. civ. 16). When David

¹ "Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days ? But he spake of the temple of his body" (John ii. 19-21).

² "Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona : for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church ; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. xvi. 16-18). This testimony of Peter, like the Church founded upon the Rock of Ages, has withstood all the powers of Satan to overturn it.

would speak of a child of God, growing in grace and knowledge, he says, "He shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Those that be planted in the house of the LORD, shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing" (Ps. xcii. 12-14). Both they and the fir-trees are spoken of, even by the enemies of Israel, as "tall" and "choice."¹

The present time seems the preparation of these cedar-beams and fir-rafters. The means used by Christ to separate His people and to bring them through deep waters to the place He appoints for them, seems indicated in the arrangements made by Solomon respecting these beams. But unless the Spirit of God reveal plainly it is dangerous to speculate; and worse than dangerous to strain passages to suit our pre-conceived imaginings. The sacredness of the Word of God should ever be held inviolate; and to try and support human interpretations by forcing the meaning of any part, is presumptuous daring, the guilt of which seldom strikes us as it should.

The only and well-beloved Son of God is compared to a cedar in Ezekiel, and to a fir-tree in Hosea. "In all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren" (Heb. ii. 17).

"Thus saith the Lord God, I will also take of the highest branch of the high cedar (the royal line of David), and will set it; I will crop off from the top of

¹ "By thy servants hast thou" (Sennacherib, king of Assyria) "reproached the Lord, and hast said, By the multitude of my chariots am I come up to the height of the mountains, to the sides of Lebanon; and I will cut down the *tall cedars thereof, and the choice fir-trees thereof*: and I will enter into the height of his border, the forest of his Carmel" (Isa. xxxvii. 24).

his young twigs a tender one, and will plant it upon a high mountain and eminent: in the mountain of the height of Israel will I plant it; and it shall bring forth boughs, and bear fruit, and be a goodly cedar: and under it shall dwell all fowl of every wing; in the shadow of the branches thereof shall they dwell" (Ezek. xvii. 22, 23). Again, in Hosea we read, "I am like a *green fir-tree*, from me is thy fruit found" (Hos. xiv. 8).

Very remarkable are the words uttered by Jesus when being led to crucifixion: "If they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?" (Luke xxiii. 31). Yes, by command of the Almighty Father, that green tree was cut down, dried up and withered;—the waters came in unto His soul: He came into the depth of waters, where the floods overflowed Him! Man was the instrument. Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel (every class, every people represented), were gathered together, for to do whatsoever God's hand and counsel determined before to be done (Acts iv. 27, 28). They could have had no power at all against Him, except it were given them from above (John xix. 11). And now the same Almighty will which caused this high tree to be laid low, this green tree to be dried up, has given Him a name which is above every name, has crowned Him with glory and honour, and exalted Him "a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and remission of sins" (Acts v. 31).

"All the trees of the field shall know that I the LORD have brought down the high tree, have exalted the low tree, have dried up the green tree, and have made the dry tree to flourish; I the LORD have spoken, and have done it" (Ezek. xvii. 24).

But what has all this to do with a verse written nearly a thousand years before Christ's death? Why should we associate the agony and bloody sweat of Gethsemane, the cross and passion of Calvary, with such words as these, "The beams of our house are cedar, our rafters of fir"? Strange as it may appear, the connexion is indissoluble, the two ideas can **never** be sundered. *But that this green tree was thus cut down, dried up, and withered, this spiritual house, this temple of God, not made with hands, eternal in the heavens, could never be built.*

CHAPTER II.

VER. 1. "*I am the rose of Sharon,*"

IT is Jesus who speaks, and in the Bible the word *am* is in italics, because He speaks of Himself, "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever" (Heb. xiii. 8). The comparison is His own. When speaking of the Bride, He decks her in gold, silver, jewels,—everything that is rare and costly. He compares Himself to a flower, beautiful but fragile. It is essentially as *Jesus, the Son of Man*, that He is "the rose of Sharon, the lily of the valleys." "The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof as the flower of the field : the grass withereth, the flower fadeth : because the Spirit of the LORD bloweth upon it : surely the people is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth : but the word of our God shall stand for ever" (Isa. xl. 6-8). "As for man, his days are as grass ; as a flower of the field so he flourisheth, for the wind passeth over it, and it is gone ; and the place thereof shall know it no more" (Ps. ciii. 15, 16). Even in His exalted position at the right hand of God, crowned with glory and honour, the days of His flesh are not forgotten. He indeed grew up before God "as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground" (Isa.

liii. 2). To Sharon He is the Rose, but to all others there is "no beauty that they should desire him." This rose did not fade; it was "cut off,"¹ in order that the Word of God might stand for ever.

It is the shame and reproach of Sharon, that the Spirit should say of her, "*Sharon is like a wilderness*" (Isa. xxxiii. 9): but it shall not be always so. The time is coming *when "Sharon shall be a fold of flocks"* (Isa. lxxv. 10): when the sheep of Christ shall all be gathered together, "and there shall be one fold and one Shepherd" (John x. 16): when the beauteous Rose of Sharon shall be "a Plant of renown."²

"The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose. It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing: the glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon; they shall see the glory of the LORD, the excellency of our God" (Isa. xxxv. 1, 2).

The lily of the valleys.

It was prophesied of Jesus, "He shall grow as the lily" (Hos. xiv. 5). "Consider the lilies, how they grow; they toil not, they spin not: and yet I say unto you that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these" (Luke xii. 27; Matt. vi. 28, 29). *Let us consider this lily, how he grew.* "And the child grew and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon him" (Luke ii. 40). "And Jesus

¹ "And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself" (Dan. ix. 26).

² "And I will raise up for them a plant of renown, and they shall be no more consumed with hunger in the land, neither bear the shame of the heathen any more" (Ezek. xxxiv. 29).

increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man" (Luke ii. 52). Observe the cause of His growth,—“the grace of God was upon him.” That grace was to Him as dew upon the lilies.

Another child was growing at the same time, and waxing strong in spirit; but we do not read that he was *filled* with wisdom; and though we know that the grace of God was with him, it was not bestowed *without measure*, as in the case of the holy child Jesus.¹

Solomon tells us that “the king’s favour is as dew upon the grass” (Prov. xix. 12): and the favour of the Highest rested upon Him. It was in fulfilment of the prophecy, “I will be as the dew upon Israel” (Hos. xiv. 5), that the Spirit thus rested; that in Him all fulness might dwell, and from Him His people might receive the greatest of heavenly gifts.

But of what, or of whom, is Jesus the lily? It is *of the valleys*. His earthly career was one of deepest humility. Born in a stable, laid in a manger, the reputed son of the carpenter, the friend of publicans and sinners; this highest branch of the high cedar is “the lily of the valleys.” “Whence hath this man this wisdom and these mighty works? Is not this the carpenter’s son? Is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas? and his sisters, are they not all with us? Whence then has this man all these things? And they were offended in him” (Matt. xiii. 54-57).

This Son of Man (poorer than the very birds or

¹ The description of John Baptist’s childhood is given in a few words: “And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his shewing unto Israel” (Luke i. 80).

beasts) had not where to lay His head.¹ Amongst His very disciples He was as one that served (Luke xxii. 27).

He is pre-eminently the lily *of the valleys*. "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word" (Isa. lxvi. 2). "I *dwell* in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones" (Isa. lvii. 15). Except we humble ourselves and become as little children, Jesus cannot dwell with us, He cannot be our lily. The beautiful prophecy (Isa. xl. 4), "Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low," was in a measure fulfilled when the lowly Mary, the "humble handmaid of the Lord," was exalted to become the mother of Immanuel; but in the spread of Christ's kingdom this exaltation of valleys and lowering of mountains is continually going on. The casting down of strongholds and bringing of every thought and imagination into subjection to Christ (of which Saul of Tarsus was a remarkable example), is the work of the Spirit of God. *The lily refuses to dwell except in the valleys*. "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble" (James iv. 6).

Why is it that Jesus is to us sometimes a "fading flower"? Why is it that we lose the freshness of our love to Him, and He appears to us less beautiful than He used? It was so with Ephraim, and the reason given is their pride and drunkenness (probably not

¹ "And Jesus said unto him, Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head" (Luke ix. 58).

only intoxication with strong drink, but indulgence in worldly pleasures). "Woe to the crown of pride, to the drunkards of Ephraim, whose glorious beauty is a fading flower, which are on the head of the fat valleys of them that are overcome with wine! . . . The crown of pride, the drunkards of Ephraim, shall be trodden under feet: and the glorious beauty, which is on the head of the fat valley, shall be a fading flower, and as the hasty fruit before the summer" (Isa. xxviii. 1, 3, 4).

"When Ephraim spake trembling, he exalted himself in Israel; but when he offended in Baal, he died" (Hos. xiii. 1).

Ver. 2. *As the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters.*

The verses corresponding to this seem to be, "As he" (*the lily*) "is, so are we" (*among thorns*) "in this world" (1 John iv. 17). "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you" (John xv. 18, 19). Because His people were as lilies among thorns, Jesus thus prayed: "The world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world" (John xvii. 14-16).

Jesus (the lily) grew; so she (the lily) must grow also. "Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. iii. 18).

At the close of every one of Paul's epistles, he im-

plores this grace for those to whom he writes ; and we must remember that the Spirit who inspired him intended these epistles for the whole Church in all ages.

The lilies were without carefulness. " And why take ye thought for raiment ? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow ; they toil not, neither do they spin : And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these " (Matt. vi. 28, 29). They were beautiful emblems of faith and trust. Their loveliness was altogether a gift from above, and might teach us how vain and unprofitable a thing it is to try and cover ourselves with our own works, when a righteousness pure, spotless, complete, is offered us from heaven. But specially did the Divine Teacher point to them as instances of a Father's care and love. " Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith ? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat ? or, What shall we drink ? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed ? (for after all these things do the Gentiles seek ;) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness ; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow ; for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof " (Matt. vi. 30-34).

It is because of her simple faith in God that the King compares his Bride to a lily ; and it is this faith which Paul would urge the Philippians to attain. " Be careful for nothing ; but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests

be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall" (as a consequence) "keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Phil. iv. 6). In the same way Peter entreats us to cast *all* our care upon Him, for He careth for us (2 Pet. v. 7).

The growth, the blossom, the fragrance of the lily, show that it drinketh in the dew which falleth oft upon it, and receiveth (it can *do* nothing, but *receiveth all*) the blessing from above.

This lily is surrounded by thorns—"the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things."¹ Yet she has "no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reproves them" (Eph. v. 11). One way in which she reproves them is *by contrast*. It would seem as if Paul wished to mark the difference between the lilies and the thorns when he wrote, "Godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment, let us be therewith content." This is the characteristic of the lily. "But"—observe the contrast—"they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil; which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But thou, O man of God, flee these things" (1 Tim. vi. 6-11).

Repeatedly do the apostles warn us to beware of these thorns: "Love not the world, neither the things

¹ Compared to thorns in the parable of the Sower (Matt. xiii. 7-22; Mark iv. 3-20).

that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world" (1 John ii. 15, 16).

We are urged to grow, and rise above them, in these beautiful lines: "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory. Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry" (Col. iii. 1-5).

Thorns, emblems of the curse,¹ formed the crown of Him who bore the curse, because He bore the sin.

All through Scripture runs the idea of thorns disturbing the peace of God's people on earth. Israel in the midst of the Canaanites,² who were "thorns in their sides"—"thorns in their eyes:" the vineyard of the Lord overrun with thorns:³ the seed of the Word choked by thorns:⁴ a thorn in the flesh of God's chosen servant, the messenger of Satan sent to buffet him:⁵ the

¹ "Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee" (Gen. iii. 18).

² "Those which ye let remain of them shall be pricks in your eyes, and thorns in your sides" (Num. xxxiii. 55).

³ "And I will lay it waste; it shall not be pruned nor digged; but there shall come up briers and thorns" (Isa. v. 6).

⁴ "And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them" (Matt. xiii. 7).

⁵ "Lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure" (2 Cor. xii. 7).

earth bearing "thorns and briers, rejected, and nigh to cursing: whose end is to be burned" (Heb. vi. 8).

Truly "the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body" (Rom. viii. 22, 23). "For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God" (Rom. viii. 19)—for the lilies to be separated from the thorns.

Two beautiful promises are given to the people of God in the Old Testament. We are told by Ezekiel (xxviii. 24) that "there shall be no more a pricking brier unto the house of Israel, nor any grieving thorn of all that are round about them, that despised them." And by Isaiah (lv. 13) that "instead of the thorn shall come up the fir-tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle-tree; and it shall be to the LORD for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off." Finally, we read in the Revelation that death itself shall be destroyed,¹ that a new heaven and earth shall be established,² and that there shall be NO MORE CURSE.³

Let us look at the place the lilies occupied in the Temple of Solomon:—

"The chapiters that were upon the top of the pillars were of lily-work in the porch, four cubits" (1 Kings vii. 19).

"And he set up the pillars in the porch of the temple; and he set up the right pillar, and called the name thereof Jachin; and he set up the left pillar, and

¹ "And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire" (Rev. xx. 14).

² "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away" (Rev. xxi. 1).

³ "And there shall be no more curse" (Rev. xxii. 3).

called the name thereof Boaz" (Jachin, *i.e.* He shall establish; Boaz, *i.e.* It is strength). "And upon the top of the pillars was lily-work: *so was the work of the pillars finished.*"

It seems full of significance that the crowning and finishing of these important pillars should be *lily-work*.

Around the molten sea were the lilies themselves. This sea was "an handbreadth thick" (the span of man's life),¹ "and the brim thereof was wrought like the brim of a cup, *with flowers of lilies*" (1 Kings vii. 26).

Another sea is spoken of in Revelation: "And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire; and *them that had gotten the victory* over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name, *stand on the sea of glass*, having the harps of God. And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints. Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy; for all nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy judgments are made manifest"² (Rev. xv. 2-4). The King says, His love is as the lily (he looks on His people as *one*), but the daughters of men are as thorns. There are but two classes mentioned—the children of God (made so by adoption) and the children of men. Let us be very certain to which we belong—let us examine ourselves whether we be in the faith; let us prove our own selves. "Know ye not your

¹ "Behold, thou hast made my days as an handbreadth" (Ps. xxxix. 5).

² In the Temple of Solomon "the cedar of the house within was carved with knops (gourds) and open flowers (*openings of flowers*)," (1 Kings vi. 18).

own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?" (2 Cor. xiii. 5.) Those who have the spirit of the Lily, Christ, are His; those who have the spirit of the world are thorns. The lily lives by faith, the thorns by sight. The latter are "lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God" (2 Tim. iii. 4).

We read in Genesis "that the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair" (Gen. vi. 2). But "what is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God" (Luke xvi. 15). How slow we are to learn that "that which is born of the flesh is flesh;" that we must be born again; that man in his natural state is "abominable and filthy, and drinketh iniquity like water" (Job xv. 16); that "they that are in the flesh cannot please God" (Rom. viii. 8); that they are thorns, and not lilies!

Ver. 3. *As the apple-tree among the trees of the wood,
so is my beloved among the sons.*

"Every tree is known by his own fruit," and the fruit of this tree is apples. We are told that "a word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver" (Prov. xxv. 11); for the fruit of wisdom is better than gold (Prov. viii. 19), and Christ is our wisdom. Of God He is made unto us "wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption" (1 Cor. i. 30). "Wisdom is" indeed "a tree of life to them that lay hold of her" (Prov. iii. 18), for "the excellency of knowledge is, that wisdom giveth life to them that have it" (Eccles. vii. 12).

It is as the tree of life that Jesus is the apple-tree.

The first mention we have of the tree of life is in Genesis ii. 9: "Out of the ground made the LORD God

to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden."

By sin, all access to this tree was stopped. "And now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever," God "drove out the man; and placed at the garden of Eden cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life" (Gen. iii. 22-24).

The privilege lost by the first Adam has been regained by the second, at the price of His blood. "In the midst of the street of the new Jerusalem, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations" (Rev. xxii. 2).

The apple-tree is *among* the trees of the wood. It grew out of the ground as they did.¹ The Word was made flesh, and tabernacled among us (John i. 14). The difference between them and it is this,—it, and it only, is *the tree of life*.

The trees of the wood are mentioned in Ps. xcvi. 12. Speaking of the LORD's reign and His righteous judgment of the people, David says, "Then shall all the trees of the wood rejoice before the LORD; for he cometh, for he cometh to judge the earth: he shall judge the world with righteousness, and the people with his truth." And Isaiah speaks in a similar manner: "The mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands" (Isa. lv. 12).

¹ In Isa. liii. 2 Jesus is spoken of as a "root out of a dry ground."

Thus did our Saviour tell His disciples when certain signs of His coming appeared, to look up, and lift up their heads; for their redemption drew nigh (Luke xxi. 28); and thus does the Spirit teach the child of God to "look for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ" (Tit. ii. 13).

As the apple-tree represents Christ, so these trees of the wood represent the sons:—not the sons of men—though they are that by nature;—but sons of God, which they have become by adoption. "Beloved, *now* are we the sons of God" (1 John iii. 1).

Looking at this apple-tree surrounded by the trees of the wood (Jesus in the midst of His people), Isaiah prophetically exclaimed, "Behold, I and the children whom the Lord hath given me!"¹ (Isa. viii. 8.) These trees are of every clime. In Isaiah we have the fir-tree, the pine-tree, the box, and the myrtle named.

Let us examine the apple-tree in the light of Scripture:

It stands in the midst, open on all sides. Every class, every denomination, every age may have access. From all parts men may come, and he that cometh shall in no wise be cast out.

Its shadow invites the weary. "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. xi. 28). It is "a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat" (Isa. xxv. 4).

Its fruit invites the hungry. He that eateth of its life-giving fruit shall live for ever, for it is a tree of life to him who (by faith) layeth hold of it. Blessed

¹ Quoted by Paul, in Hebrews ii. 13, as referring to Christ and His brethren.

are they who hunger for this Divine fruit; and woe, unutterable woe, to those who reject it. "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?" (Heb. ii. 3.)

I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste.

Led by the Spirit to this tree of life (for no man can come otherwise),¹ the Bride sits down under its shadow. Having found Christ precious, she desires to remain with Him. Here she is sheltered from the hot sun of persecution,² and here she rests from toil and care, while she feeds on the fruit which hangs from the tree. Thus did the poor demoniac, when the leaves of this wondrous tree of life³ had healed him, come to Jesus and sit at His feet, clothed and in his right mind. Thus did Mary of Bethany, esteeming it her chief delight to hearken to the words of eternal life, which were most sweet to her taste.⁴ To the child of God, the words of Jesus (the words so fitly spoken, and such as no other man ever spoke) are the food of the soul. "Thy words were found, and I did eat them: and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called by thy name, O LORD God of Hosts" (Jer. xv. 16). "I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food" (Job xxiii. 12). "How sweet are thy words to my taste, yea, sweeter than honey to

¹ "No man can come unto me except the Father which hath sent me draw him" (John vi. 44).

² In the parable of the Sower, tribulation and persecution are likened to the scorching sun.

³ "The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations" (Rev. xxii. 2; also in Ezekiel xlvii. 12). The account of the demoniac is in Mark v. 2-15.

⁴ Mary of Bethany is first spoken of, Luke x. 39.

my mouth!" (Ps. cxix. 102). They are "sweeter than honey, and the honey-comb" (Ps. xix. 10).

The faith which has brought her to the tree entitles her to eat of its pleasant fruit,

FOR

"Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God" (1 John v. 1),

"Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world" (1 John v. 4),

AND

"To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God" (Rev. ii. 7).

Being led by the Spirit in the way of Christ's commands, she is entitled by Him to appropriate each promise contained in Christ.

"Hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1 John ii. 3, 4).

"Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life" (Rev. xxii. 14).

Ver. 4. *He brought me to the banqueting-house (house of wine),*

He brought her. How otherwise could she go?

"Being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ: *by whom* also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God" (Rom. v. 1, 2). This is "*the banqueting-house.*" No house of earthly revelry deserves the name. Here she has sweet experience of the love of God in Christ, and her soul

exclaims, "How amiable are thy tabernacles, O LORD of hosts!" (Ps. lxxxiv. 1.) Here she has extended views of God's power and glory, and realizes how much better is His loving-kindness than love. This "house of wine" suggests the banquet to which Esther invited the king, after she had touched the golden sceptre he had held out to her.¹ At that banquet her prayer is not for herself, as an individual; though she has been invited to petition the half of the kingdom. Her whole desire is for her people, from whom she will not be isolated, even in her exaltation. The favour shown her she makes use of to plead the cause of her whole nation.

How much we may learn from this!

When we, who have been brought nigh to God by appropriating through faith the pardon He holds out,

¹ "Now it came to pass on the third day, that Esther put on her royal apparel, and stood in the inner court of the king's house, over against the king's house: and the king sat upon his royal throne in the royal house. And it was so, when the king saw Esther the queen standing in the court, that she obtained favour in his sight: and the king held out to Esther the golden sceptre that was in his hand. So Esther drew near, and touched the top of the sceptre. Then said the king unto her, What wilt thou, queen Esther? and what is thy request? it shall be given thee to the half of the kingdom. And Esther answered, If it seem good unto the king, let the king and Haman come this day unto the banquet that I have prepared for him. So the king and Haman came to the banquet that Esther had prepared. And the king said unto Esther at the banquet of wine, What is thy petition? and it shall be granted thee: and what is thy request? even to the half of the kingdom it shall be performed. Then answered Esther, and said, My petition and my request is; if I have found favour in the sight of the king, and if it please the king to grant my petition, and to perform my request, let the king and Haman come to the banquet that I shall prepare for them. I will do to-morrow as the king hath said" (Esther v. 1-8).

"So the king and Haman came to the banquet with Esther the queen. And the king said again unto Esther on the second day, at the banquet of wine, What is thy petition, queen Esther? and it shall be granted thee: and what is thy request? and it shall be

are brought into close communion with Him, and feel our hearts drawn out in prayer, why are we so miserably selfish, why do we so seldom pray except for ourselves, our personal friends, or the members of our family? Why does not our heart burn within us to lay before the King of kings the state of the whole Church, scattered, in bondage, and ready to perish? Why do we not in prayer acquaint Him with the machinations of our great adversary, and earnestly entreat the destruction of every enemy of our people? Why (when we do pray for the welfare of the Church) are our hearts so cold, our prayers so dull and formal, as if their sorrows were not ours?

Oh that the Lord would multiply remembrancers,¹ such as Esther, who, like Moses² and Paul,³ sought not

performed, even to the half of the kingdom. Then Esther the queen answered and said, If I have found favour in thy sight, O king, and if it please the king, let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request: for we are sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be slain, and to perish: but if we had been sold for bond-men and bond-women, I had held my tongue, although the enemy could not countervail the king's damage. Then the king Ahasuerus answered and said unto Esther, Who is he, and where is he, that durst presume in his heart to do so? And Esther said, The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman."

The conclusion of this memorable banquet was the destruction and death of Haman, the Jews' enemy; the complete deliverance of Esther's people, the Jews; and the elevation of Mordecai, who had instigated Esther to make the petition (Esther, chapter vii. to end).

¹ "Ye that make mention of the LORD" (that are the LORD's remembrancers), "keep not silence, and give him no rest, till he establish, and till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth" (Isa. lxii. 6, 7).

² The intercession of Moses for the people was very remarkable: "Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin—; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written" (Exod. xxxii. 32).

³ "Paul declared that his conscience bore him witness in the Holy Ghost, that he had great heaviness and continual sorrow in

her own interest apart from that of her people, who put aside all consideration of self, and in noble self-forgetfulness ceased not till the enemy was destroyed, and her people saved !¹ These prayers are indeed "not according to the law ;" for the law gives no man right to approach the sacred presence of Jehovah ; but *they are according to the gospel*. For the sake of the Crucified One we may "come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." And when kneeling there, let us in faith bring before the Lord the burdens of that "holy nation, that peculiar people," to whom we belong.

And his banner over me was love.

Is there in the whole word of God a passage more delightful than this ? Is there one in which Faith speaks more strongly, more sweetly ? Need we fear urging any petition, however great, while above us hangs, sheltering beneath its ample folds, this wondrous banner, LOVE ? Does it not seem to say to us, "If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it ?" (John xiv. 14.) "Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name : ask, and ye shall receive, *that your joy may be full*" (John xvi. 24). That your joy may be full ! Yes, it

his heart, for he could wish that himself were separated from Christ for his brethren, his kinsmen according to the flesh (Rom. ix. 1-3). We cannot understand such love ; it was evidently wrought by the Spirit in his heart.

¹ The Book of Esther abounds in beautiful allusions to other parts of God's Word. While she prepares to plead, all the representatives of her nation fast in deep humility. "Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink *three days*, night or day ; I also and my maidens will fast likewise ; and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law ; and if I perish, I perish" (Esther iv. 16).

is this banner which makes the banqueting-house *the house of wine*. And truly it matters not what our earthly circumstances may be ; if we see this banner above us, and can read this one word LOVE, *we are in the banqueting-house*.

There is a depth of beauty in each word of this exquisitely beautiful passage. "*He*," the King, who had alone the right to bring—" *He*," against whom I have been sinning all my life long—" *He*," who died to purchase for Himself the right to bring me—" *He*," who intercedes with the Father that all hindrances to my coming may be removed. "*He brought me*,"—He does not send me. If He were not there, it could be no house of wine to me. He *brings* me, for though He has purchased my right to be there, I cannot move one step towards it without Him. And it is I whom He brings,—" *I*," once the child of wrath, once His enemy, who hated Him, who resisted Him, who struggled against His loving power, with all the might of my puny strength. And where does He bring me ? When He has conquered and made me His willing captive, He is not satisfied with supplying all my need, and giving me abundance out of His spiritual stores. No. He brings me to the banqueting-house—to the house of wine ! there to have foretastes of the fulness of joy, of the pleasures for evermore which are at God's right hand ; there to be satisfied abundantly with the fatness of His house, to drink of the river of His pleasures (Ps. xvi. 11 ; xxxvi. 8). In this house, *when I look up*, what do I see ? Not an angry God, but a *protecting banner*. And this banner is His, His against whom I have so often sinned, against whom I am sinning continually. It is *His* banner : " For God so loved the world, that

he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John iii. 16). And it is *over me, nothing between, for what can separate us from the love of Christ?* Tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? "Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors, through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus" (Rom. viii. 35-39).

"*His banner over me was love.*" In our Bibles the verse reads thus, but in the original *there is no word indicating time*. As in verse 1 Jesus says, "*I, the rose of Sharon, the lily of the valleys,*" so here, "*His banner over me love.*" This love is eternal. It never had a beginning. It never can have an end. It is always over God's people, protecting them at all times, but they (through indolence, hankering after the world, or unbelief) are often blind, and cannot read the word written in letters of light. Even at the best of times here "we see through a glass darkly," and trace with difficulty the "LOVE" which has planned each step of our pilgrimage-life. And yet it is well to notice that it is *after* the Bride has sat down under His shadow with great delight, and eaten His pleasant fruits, that she is brought into the banqueting-house, and sees above her the banner.

If we could realize that the banner *has been always, is always, and will be always over us*, how differently would the various events of life affect us! The loss of friends (by change or death), of wealth, of position, of

earthly comforts, of health—even the petty annoyances of every-day life, so apt to irritate and perplex the Christian, and sometimes seeming to threaten total obstruction to his heavenly course—all these would be seen by faith to be working together for our good ! When shall we put away our childish pettishness at God's dealings towards us ? When shall we learn to trust Him whose love has led us all our way hitherto ? When shall we take God at His word, and, casting all our care on Him who careth for us, rest beneath His banner LOVE ?

One more glance at this banner ! We read (Ps. lx. 4),—"Thou hast given a banner to them that feared thee, that it may be displayed because of the truth." What is this banner which God hath given to them that feared Him ? Paul answers the question for us : "Thou hast put all under His (Christ's) feet," *and given Him, head over all, to the church*¹ (Eph. i. 22). This banner is given, *in order that it may be displayed*.² Those who have Christ should seek to make Him known to others. Under this banner we shall be more than conquerors.

Three passages from the Word of God say more than any human being could tell us of this banner. In Exodus xvii. 15 we are told that "Moses built an altar, and called the name of it (the altar) JEHOVAH-nissi"—

"The LORD my banner." In 1 John iv. 8, 16, we read

"God is LOVE." And in Cant. ii. 4

"His banner over me LOVE."

"He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most

¹ The words printed in the Bible in italics are left out—not being in the original.

² When considering this banner as carried before the soldiers of the Cross, it should ever be remembered that it is *the banner (not the bearer)* which is to be displayed.

High, shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty"
(Ps. xci. 1).

Ver. 5. *Stay me with flagons,*

Stay, *i.e.* sustain,¹ me. She is in herself utter weakness, and needs support ; and never does she feel this more than when brought into the banqueting-house. Strong, vivid revelations of Christ's love make us feel our own infirmities. It was at such a time the Lord said to Paul : " My grace is sufficient for thee : for my strength is made perfect in weakness " (2 Cor. xii. 9).

In the court of the gardens of the king's palace at Shushan, we read, " And they gave them drink in vessels of gold (the vessels being diverse one from another), and royal wine in abundance, according to the state of the king. And the drinking was according to the law ; none did compel : for so the king had appointed to all the officers of his house, that they should do according to every man's pleasure " (Esther i. 7, 8).

In the Song, the Bride asks flagons—the largest measure. She asks from the King ; for " they shall hang upon *him* all the glory of his father's house, the offspring, and the issue, all vessels of small quantity, from the vessels of cups, even to all the vessels of flagons " ² (Isa. xxii. 23). He has invited her to ask,

¹ Thus in Isaiah iii. 1 :—" The LORD of hosts doth take away from Jerusalem, and from Judah, the stay and the staff, the whole stay of bread, and the whole stay of water."

² Spoken of Eliakim, in his official character as type of Christ. " I will call my servant Eliakim, the son of Hilkiah : and I will clothe him with thy robe, and strengthen him with thy girdle, and I will commit thy government into his hand ; and he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to the house of Judah, and the key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder ;

*that her joy may be full;*¹ and she asks largely, remembering the promise (Ps. lxxxi. 10), "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it." There is no limit, for He "is able to do exceeding abundantly *above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us*" (Eph. iii. 20). And "my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Phil. iv. 19).

Her prayer is not for earthly joy, but for an abundant outpouring of the Spirit: "Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit" (Eph. v. 18). "The kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost" (Rom. xiv. 17).

We are told in 2 Samuel vi. 17-20 that David had the ark of the LORD brought in, and set in its place, "in the midst of the tabernacle that David had pitched for it: and David offered burnt-offerings and peace-offerings before the LORD. And as soon as David had made an end of offering burnt-offerings and peace-offerings, he blessed the people in the name of the LORD of hosts. And he dealt among all the people, among the whole multitude of Israel, as well to the women as men, to every one a cake of bread, and a good piece of flesh, and a flagon of wine. So all the people departed every one to his house. Then David returned to bless his household."

The Divine Presence which the ark symbolized has so he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open. And I will fasten him, a nail in a sure place; and he shall be for a glorious throne to his father's house" (Isa. xxii. 20, 23).

¹ Twice in the solemn address after the Last Supper our Lord uses this expression, "that your joy might be full" (John xv. 11; xvi. 24). It is His wish that His people should rejoice in Him always.

been in the midst of us: "The Word was made flesh, and tabernacled among us" (John i. 14), and His Spirit now dwells amongst His people. "I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth" (John xiv. 16, 17). "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit dwelleth in you?" (1 Cor. iii. 16.) Ye "are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit" (Eph. xi. 22).

It is because the ark has been brought, and set in his place in the midst of the tabernacle—*because of Immanuel, God with us, that each may have the flagon. It is when Christ dwells in our hearts by faith we desire it.* Why are we satisfied with so little? Surely the straitening is not with God, but in our own bowels! We are content that our spiritual life should be a bare existence; neither giving glory to God nor comfort to ourselves. We confess that we are weak, and that the life of God in our souls is not the vigorous, healthy, earnest power it ought to be. We sometimes lament this, and wonder where is the remedy. It lies here: "The joy of the LORD is your strength" (Neh. viii. 10). Ask for this joy. You have a right to ask for it, and you ought to ask *to be made desire it.* Ask it, not for yourself alone, but for all God's people scattered throughout the world. God *has made* known to you the way of life. He *shall make* you full of joy with His countenance (Acts xi. 28).

*Comfort me with apples. (Marg. Strew me with apples.)*¹

The word *comfort* suggests the Comforter, and the means He uses to comfort her are the apples of gold—

¹ The banquet suggested the flagon; the apple-tree, the apples.

the words of life (fitly spoken) of Jesus. "The Comforter, the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you" (John xiv. 26).

The word *strawed* (the marginal reading) is used in Matthew xxi. 8, where the multitude on Christ's entry into Jerusalem cut down branches from the trees, and strawed them in the way; also in the twenty-fifth chapter, verse 26, in the parable of the Talents, where the slothful servant accused his master of gathering where he had not strawed.

The Bride desires to be strawed with the fruit of the tree of life. She prays that the promises of God in Christ may be thickly strewn, as it were, around her; that those which she feels unable to lay hold of, which are above, and beyond her poor faith to appropriate, may be brought within her reach, "For," she adds,

"I am sick of love."

"This sickness"—like that of Lazarus—"is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby" (John xi. 4). All that is needed for her cure is the presence of her Lord. "As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?" (Ps. xlii. 1, 2.) "O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee; my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land where no water is; to see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary" (Ps. lxiii. 1, 2). "My soul breaketh for the longing unto thy judgments at all times." "My

soul cleaveth unto the dust; quicken thou me *according to thy word.*" "My soul melteth for heaviness, strengthen thou me *according unto thy word.*" "Behold, *I have longed after thy precepts*; quicken me in thy righteousness." "My soul fainteth for thy salvation; but *I hope in thy word.*" "*Mine eyes fail for thy word*, saying, When wilt thou comfort me?" "For I am become like a bottle in the smoke; yet do I not forget thy statutes." "*Mine eyes fail for thy salvation*, and for *the word of thy righteousness*" (Ps. cxix. 20, 25, 28, 40, 81, 83, 123).

The same feeling of intense longing for the presence of the Lord is manifested by the prophet (speaking in the name of the whole Church) when he exclaims, "Oh that thou wouldest rend the heavens, that thou wouldest come down, that the mountains might flow down at thy presence!" (Isa. lxiv. 1.)

Ver. 6. *His left hand is under my head, and his right hand doth embrace me.*

The prayer is answered; not perhaps exactly as she expected, but answered in a manner worthy of Him to whom she has prayed. Her eyes are opened to see the exaltation of Christ, and her secure position in Him; not merely the security of safety from danger, but the security of loving, watchful, tender care throughout eternity. "The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms" (Deut. xxxiii. 27).

Solomon, speaking of Wisdom, says that "length of days is in her right hand; and in her left hand riches and honour" (Prov. iii. 16), that "riches and honour are with her, yea, durable riches and righteousness" (Prov. viii. 18). These riches and honour are designed by

Eternal Wisdom to be the heritage of the Head of the Church. "And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne, and the living creatures, and the elders : and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands ; saying, with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever. And the four living creatures said, Amen. And the four and twenty elders fell down and worshipped him that liveth for ever and ever" (Rev. v. 12-14).

In the right hand of Wisdom is length of days. It is the right hand which embraces her, and this embrace implies salvation for eternity.

"He" (the King) "asked life of thee" (the Father), "thou gavest him length of days for ever and ever" (Ps. xxi. 4). This "length of days" He gives to His people : "I give unto them eternal life ; and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand" (John x. 28).

Observe what is said of this right hand :—

It is "saving strength."—"Now know I that the LORD saveth his anointed ; he will hear him from his holy heaven *with the saving strength of his right hand*" (Ps. xx. 6).

With it God is said to save His people.—"O thou that savest by thy right hand them which put their trust in thee" (Ps. xvii. 7). "That thy beloved

may be delivered, save with thy right hand, and hear me" (Ps. lx. 5).

With it He does valiantly.—"The right hand of the LORD is exalted; the right hand of the LORD doeth valiantly" (Ps. cxviii. 16).

It is glorious in power.—"Thy right hand, O LORD, is become glorious in power; thy right hand, O LORD, hath dashed in pieces the enemy" (Exod. xv. 6).

With it He purchased a sanctuary.—"He brought them to the border of his sanctuary, this mountain which his right hand had purchased" (Ps. lxxviii. 54).

With it He gained the victory.—"O sing unto the LORD a new song; for he hath done marvellous things: his right hand, and his holy arm, hath gotten him the victory" (Ps. xcvi. 1).

It is as if embracing the Church with his right hand, he puts forth almighty power for her defence and support. "Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, *I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness*" (Isa. xli. 10). "Israel shall be saved *in the LORD* with an everlasting salvation; ye shall not be ashamed nor confounded, world without end" (Isa. xlv. 17).

It is because of Christ's exaltation that the Church is upheld and supported. Because the Head is raised, the body is clasped in this eternal embrace. It is this the Christian loves to contemplate,—the resurrection, the ascension, the glory of her Lord!

Ver. 7. *I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes, and by the hinds of the field, that ye stir not up, nor awake my love, till he please.*

Who are these daughters of Jerusalem who are thus solemnly charged (*adjured*) not to disturb this interview between the King and the Bride? We read of them that they followed Jesus to the cross, bewailing and lamenting Him.¹ They took part in the rebuilding of the holy city, and are honourably mentioned by that devoted servant of the Lord, Nehemiah, who states that "next unto him" (Hashub) "repaired Shallum the son of Halohesh, the ruler of the half part of Jerusalem, he and his daughters" (Neh. iii. 12). It does not therefore appear that the daughters of Jerusalem are *aliens*; on the contrary, they seem to be the children of God.

She charges them by the roes, remarkable for their swiftness;² and by the hinds of the field, not only swift, but easily disturbed and startled. She dreads the least interruption lest her Beloved go forth and leave her.

There are times when the Christian must be alone with the Lord; when the presence even of the godly is a restraint. Thus Jesus took the three favoured disciples

¹ "And there followed him a great company of people, and of women, which also bewailed and lamented him. But Jesus turning unto them, said, Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children" (Luke xxiii. 27, 28).

² Of Asahel it was said he was "light of foot as a wild roe" (2 Sam. ii. 18); and of the mighty men of Gad who went to David, "they were swift as the roes upon the mountain" (1 Chron. xii. 8). Naphtali was compared to "a hind let loose" (Gen. xlix. 21). The readiness with which this animal forsakes its young is mentioned, Jer. xiv. 5, where famine would cause the hind to leave its offspring in the field; and in Job xxxix. 4 we read that their young ones as readily forsake them: "They go forth and return not unto them." It is as if the Bride exclaimed—"I charge you, lest He should quickly leave me, and return not again, that you disturb Him not."

apart into the Mount of Transfiguration ; and on the night of His betrayal was withdrawn *even from them*.

And as with the individual, so with the whole Church. There are times when every human voice must be silent, and she must wait on the Lord in earnest, watchful prayer. Such a time was it when the disciples, having appointed two of their number (witnesses of the resurrection), prayed, saying, "Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen" (Acts ii. 24). Such a time was it when, "as they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them" (Acts xiii. 2).

Such seasons have sometimes come to the Church since the days of the apostles (often in times of great perplexity and apparent danger), and have been seasons of much spiritual strengthening. They are not intended to last, rather they seem for the purpose of enabling the people of God to meet fearlessly trials of various kinds, and to gird themselves for conflict.

Beautifully does the Bride add, "*till he please*." In this, as in all else, His will be done—like Peter's proposal on the Mount, prefaced by the words "If thou wilt."

Ver. 8. *The voice of my beloved ! behold, he cometh leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills.*

It is the voice of her Beloved Himself which breaks the silence !

This voice is heard in different tones. When heard by John and by Ezekiel, it was "as the sound of many waters."¹ When heard by Daniel, it was "*like the voice*

¹ "And his voice as the sound of many waters" (Rev. i. 15). "And, behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east, and his voice was like a noise of many waters" (Ezek. xliii. 2).

of a multitude."¹ When heard by Job, it thundered marvellously.² In David's account it was powerful, and full of majesty.³ When heard by Elijah, it was "a still small voice."⁴

This "voice once shook the earth ; but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven " (Heb. xii. 26).

This voice awakes the dead.⁵

However it is heard, she recognises it ; for His sheep know His voice.

By faith she perceives His approach, and points Him out to others. "Behold, he cometh *leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills.*"

What would be obstacles to others, only speed Him on His way. For has He not said, "I will make all my mountains a way, and my highways shall be exalted" ? (Isa. xlix. 11.) "Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low : and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain." "O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain ; O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength ; lift it up, be not afraid ; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God !" (Isa. xl. 4, 9.) Thus, "the mountains shall

¹ "His body also was like the beryl, and his face as the appearance of lightning, and his eyes as lamps of fire, and his arms and his feet like in colour to polished brass, and the voice of his words like the voice of a multitude" (Dan. x. 6).

² "God thundereth marvellously with his voice" (Job xxxvii. 5).

³ "The voice of the LORD is powerful, the voice of the LORD is full of majesty" (Ps. xxix. 4).

⁴ "After the fire a still small voice" (1 Kings xix. 12).

⁵ "He cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth ! and he that was dead came forth" (John xi. 43, 44). "All that are in the graves shall hear his voice." "The dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God" (John v. 25, 28).

bring peace to the people, and the little hills, by righteousness" (Ps. lxii. 3).

It is *by faith* the Bride sees Him coming (for, "faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen," Heb. xi. 1), and *the mountains as means to this end, or else cast down as obstacles*.¹

She looks continually "for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ" (Tit. ii. 13).

Ver. 9. *My beloved is like a roe, or a young hart :*

For swiftness—

"Behold, I come quickly" (Rev. iii. 11).

"Surely I come quickly" (Rev. xxii. 7, 12, 20).

The prophet Joel saw the day of the Lord coming, and nigh at hand, eight hundred years before Christ;² and Zephaniah said it was near, and hasted greatly.³

Behold, he standeth behind our wall, he looketh forth at the windows, shewing himself through the lattice.

It seems as if He stood behind the wall in order to protect her. In building the wall of Jerusalem (the

¹ "Jesus answered and said unto them, Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig-tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea, it shall be done. And all things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive" (Matt. xxi. 21, 22). Many obstacles to the spread of Christ's kingdom are now being removed in answer to prayer. *No one can conceive the immense power the prayer of faith of the united Church would have in removing everything which opposes that kingdom.*

² "Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain; let all the inhabitants of the land tremble; for the day of the LORD cometh, for it is nigh at hand" (Joel ii. 1).

³ "The great day of the LORD is near, it is near, and hasteth greatly, even the voice of the day of the LORD; the mighty man shall cry there bitterly" (Zeph. i. 14).

work in which the people of God are at present engaged), the workers were greatly annoyed, and the building retarded by enemies. "Therefore," says Nehemiah, "set I in the lower places behind the wall, and on the higher places, I even set the people after their families, with their swords, their spears, and their bows." "They which builded on the wall, and they that bare burdens, with those that laded, every one with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other held a weapon. For the builders, every one had his sword girded by his side, and builded. And he that sounded the trumpet was by me. And I said unto the nobles, and to the rulers, and to the rest of the people, The work is great and large, and we are separated upon the wall, one far from another. In what place ye hear the sound of the trumpet, resort ye thither unto us: *our God shall fight for us*" (Neh. iv. 13, 17-20). "Behold! he standeth behind our wall!" Though concealed, He is at hand for our defence whilst we work. The Bride calls it "*our wall*;" His as well as hers. Thus Paul says, "We are labourers together with God: . . . ye are God's building" (1 Cor. iii. 9). And again, "We then, as workers together with him" (2 Cor. vi. 1).

"*He looketh forth at the windows,*" whence are poured forth *blessings*,¹ and *judgments*.² *Behind them faith sees Christ.*

¹ "Prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not *open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing*, that there shall not be room enough to receive it" (Mal. iii. 10).

² "In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, the seventeenth day of the month, the same day were all the fountains of the great deep broken up, and *the windows of heaven were opened*" (Gen. vii. 11).

"He that cometh up out of the midst of the pit shall be taken

There may be an allusion to the house of the forest of Lebanon, where "there were windows in three rows, and light against light in three ranks" (1 Kings vii. 4): or to the temple of Ezekiel, where the windows were narrow or closed.¹ In looking forth, He showed *Himself*. It required to approach closely to see at all, and *even* then she sees but dimly: "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but when that which is perfect is come, face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known" (1 Cor. xiii. 12).

Through the "lattice" she sees by faith "Him who is invisible;" whom having not seen (with bodily eyes) she loves; in whom though now she sees him not, yet believing, she rejoices with joy unspeakable, and full of glory (1 Pet. i. 8). It is this faith which was commended by our Lord: "Because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: *blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed*" (John xx. 29).

It is in *the Word* that Jesus manifests Himself to His people: "Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of me" (John v. 39). How dull were the disciples to see Jesus in the Old Testament prophecies, till He opened their understanding, and showed them *Himself* through the lattice! How necessary that whenever we open the sacred volume we should ask the Spirit of God to remove the veil from our eyes and hearts, and enable us to see more and more clearly Him to whom

in the snare; *for the windows from on high are open, and the foundations of the earth do shake*" (Isa. xxiv. 18).

¹ "And there were narrow windows (closed windows) to the little chambers, and to their posts within the gate round about, and likewise to the arches; and windows round about inward (within)" (Ezek. xl. 16).

all the prophets bear witness! Blessed are the eyes which see; the hearts to whom the Spirit reveals Jesus in the Word!

Ver. 10. *My beloved spake, and said unto me, Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away.*

When Jesus speaks let those who have ears to hear, hear. Many "seeing, see not, and hearing, hear not, neither do they understand" (Matt. xiii. 13). In this verse the Beloved addresses Himself to the Bride alone. To all others this address would be "as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument:" for they would hear his words and do them not (Ezek. xxxiii. 32). "In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: for their heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted and healed" (Matt. xiii. 14, 15).

He invites her to rise up, and come away—away from where she can only have dim and indistinct views of Him her soul loveth. "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light" (Eph. v. 14). "Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon thee" (Isa. lx. 1). "Arise and depart; for this is not your rest: because it is polluted, it shall destroy, even with a sore destruction" (Micah ii. 10).

He invites her to rise *with Him* above the things of earth; to seek those things which are above, where He

sitteth at the right hand of God; to set her affections on things above, not on things on the earth. He would remind her that she is dead, and that her life is hid with Christ in God (Col. iii. 1-3).

Blessed are her ears, for they hear.

Ver. 11. *For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone;*

He points out to her the signs of the times. Winter is past. Winter is represented in Scripture as a time of suffering and danger. Our Lord told His disciples, when warning them of impending trouble, to pray that their flight "be not in the winter" (Matt. xxiv. 20). And Jehovah demands of Job, "Hast thou entered into the treasures of the snow? or hast thou seen the treasures of the hail, *which I have reserved against the time of trouble, against the day of battle and war?*" (Job xxxviii. 22, 23.)

It is the time of ploughing. In Proverbs xx. 4 we read that "the sluggard will not plough by reason of the cold (*winter*); therefore shall he beg in harvest, and have nothing."

Not only is the winter past, but the rain is over and gone. The joy which this announcement seems intended to convey reminds us of the delight which Noah must have experienced, when "God made the wind to pass over the earth; and the waters assuaged;" when "the fountains also of the deep and the windows of heaven were stopped, and the rain from heaven was restrained" (Gen. viii. 1, 2). It brings before us *relief from heavy judgment and searching out of sin.*

In that solemn scene where Ezra, after praying, confessing, weeping, and casting himself down before the

house of God, assembled the congregation of Israel, and prevailed on them to renew their covenant with God, and put away their sin, we are told that all the people sat in the street of the house of God, trembling "because of this matter, and for the great rain" (Ezra x. 1-9). The "much rain" *apparently* delayed the reformation which was about to be begun.

In Elihu's argument with Job he points out some of the mysteries of God's dealing thus: "Also by watering he wearieth the thick cloud; he scattereth his bright cloud, and it is turned round about by his counsels; that they may do whatsoever he commandeth them upon the face of the world in the earth. *He causeth it to come, whether for correction (a rod), or for his land, or for mercy*" (Job xxxvii. 11-13).

The winter (time of ploughing and preparing the ground for seed) is past, the chastisement is removed. The work for which God had sent both cold and rain is effected. "For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater; so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void; but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper whereto I sent it" (Isa. lv. 10, 11).

We are apt to forget how needful is the time of ploughing. God's ways are not as our ways. His purposes are far removed above our conception. The thunders of the law were needed, as well as the still small voice of the Gospel. The long period of childhood's bondage under tutors and governors was His appointment. But who would return to the weakness

of infancy, to the beggarly elements, when manhood's vigour and Gospel freedom are presented to him?

Each Christian has times of winter and rain; and dreary times they often are. "No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless *afterward* it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby" (Heb. xii. 11). It needs faith to see "the bright light which is in the clouds;"¹ "to feel that the rod and reproof give wisdom,"² and that were we left to ourselves we would bring shame on our profession of Christ. The Church has its winter and rain; and it behoves her at such times to hear the rod, and who hath appointed it (Micah vi. 9). What a severe, trying season was sent to Job, and what a spring-time of joy succeeded! "Ye have heard of the endurance of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy" (James v. 11). "Doth the ploughman plough all day to sow? doth he open and break the clods of his ground?" Is it for the sake of ploughing he ploughs and breaks the clods, and casts in the seed? Does he not look forward to the harvest? Is not present labour for the purpose of insuring a rich reward? "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" (2 Cor. iv. 17).

When the object for which winter and rain has been sent is effected, He who sent them will "cause the bud of the tender herb to spring forth" (Job xxxviii. 27).

¹ "And now men see not the bright light which is in the clouds; but the wind passeth and cleanseth them" (Job xxxvii. 24).

² "The rod and reproof give wisdom; but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame" (Prov. xxix. 15).

Ver. 12. *The flowers appear on the earth;*

The lilies, fed by the dew, the rain, and the sunshine from above, begin to show themselves. The incorruptible seed of the Word, long lying concealed from human eye, beneath the hard ground, manifests signs of life.¹ Within the walls of God's house may be seen openings of flowers; and each of these is graven on the palms of the Almighty's hands.²

The peaceable fruits of righteousness begin to appear.

The time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land.

The wise man tells us that "to everything" there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven. A "time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance" (Eccles. iii. 1, 4).

This is the time of singing. The season of weeping is over—the season for rejoicing begins. "For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace; the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands" (Isa. lv. 12).³

¹ The way in which the lilies grow is beautifully shown in Deut. xxxii. 2, where God says, "My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass."

² In 1 Kings vi. 18 we read, "The cedar of the house within was carved with knops and *openings of flowers*." In Isa. xlix. we have a passage curiously analogous: "Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; *thy walls are continually before me*." The student of Scripture should compare Cant. ii. 11, 12, 13, with Isa. lv. 10-12.

³ The birds mentioned in Scripture are, the sparrow which hath found an house, and the swallow which hath made a nest for herself, where she might lay her young, even the altars of the LORD of hosts. David considering this exclaims, "Blessed are they that dwell in thy house; they will be still praising thee" (Ps. lxxxiv.

Those who dwell in God's house, living close to Him, and committing to His care all their dearest interests ; those who trust Him at all times, and those who, despised by man, are yet unceasingly the objects of a Father's watchful care, now sing His praises. Such were the songs (anticipating the coming of the Saviour) sung by Mary, Elisabeth, and Zacharias (Luke i. 42-55, 67-79).

The singing is not confined to one or two. The rejoicing amongst God's people is universal.

It is *when* the flowers appear, the singing begins.

The incorruptible seed being received into one heart causes joy in heaven :¹ the appearance of the flowers causes joy on earth.²

Not only is singing heard, but also (and at the same time) the voice of the turtle. In the warnings given by Jeremiah to Israel, the prophet speaks of the turtle. "Yea, the stork in the heaven knoweth her appointed times ; and the turtle, and the crane, and the swallow, *observe the time of their coming* : but my people know not the judgment of the LORD" (Jer. viii. 7). In Ps.

3, 4). The fowls of the air are spoken of by our Saviour as exemplifying His Father's care : "Behold the fowls of the air ; for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns ; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them" (Matt. vi. 26). "Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God?" (Luke xii. 6.)

¹ "Likewise, I say unto you, There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth" (Luke xv. 10).

² Amongst the early converts, this joy was very remarkable. In Acts ii. 41, 46, 47, we read, "There were added unto them about three thousand souls. And all that believed were together, and had all things common ; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people."

lxxiv. 19 David prayed thus: "O deliver not the soul of thy turtle-dove unto the multitude: forget not the congregation of thy poor for ever."

The mournful note of the turtle mingles with the singing of the birds.

Sorrow for sin and rejoicing in a Saviour accompany one another.

In many of the Psalms the voice of the turtle and the singing of the birds blend together, and form some of the sweetest portions of the Word of God.

The Bride says "*our* land." "The earth is the LORD's, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein" (Ps. xxiv. 1). And in Christ all things are hers: "Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or *the world*, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; *all are yours*, and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's" (1 Cor. iii. 21-23).

Ver. 13. *The fig-tree putteth forth her green figs,*

We should try to discern the signs of the times.¹ The King himself notices them to his Bride: "Behold the fig-tree, and all the trees; when they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves that summer is now nigh at hand. So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand" (Luke xxi. 29-31).

It is as yet only the time of promise; but if the Christian should rejoice "although the fig-tree shall not blossom," how much more when "the fig-tree

¹ "Hypocrites! ye can discern the face of the sky, and of the earth: but how is it that ye do not discern this time?" (Luke xii. 56.)

putteth forth her green figs!" If such the joy of spring, what will be the joy of harvest?¹

And the vines with the tender grape give a good smell.

In Matthew vii. 16, thorns and thistles (signs of the curse) are contrasted with grapes and figs: "Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit."

The appearance of these trees showing signs of life, anticipates the total removal of the curse. "The earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God" (Rom. viii. 19).

The care bestowed on the vineyard at last begins to tell.

It is the vines with the tender grape which give a good smell.

We do not read of other plants than grapes and figs in this vineyard, but if there be, we know that "every plant which our heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up" (Matt. xv. 13).

The good smell is noticed by Hosea when he says, "His branches shall spread (blossom), and his beauty shall be as the olive-tree, and his smell as Lebanon" (Hosea xiv. 6): and again (ver. 7), "the scent thereof shall be as the wine of Lebanon."

The owner looks for fruit on both vines² and figs;

¹ "They joy before thee according to the joy in harvest" (Isa. ix. 3).

² "He looked that it should bring forth grapes" (Isa. v. 2). "Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig-tree" (Luke xiii. 7). "Wherefore, shew ye to them, and before the churches, the proof of your love" (2 Cor. viii. 24).

and expects this fruit to give a good smell. "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples" (John xv. 8).

Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away.

These things, instead of making her wish to remain, are used by the King as *incentives to make her desire* "a better country, that is, an heavenly:" a state where all the hopes these blossoms excite shall have full and everlasting fulfilment.

Ver. 14. *O my dove,*

It is with the Christian, and with the whole Church, as the temple of the Holy Spirit, and inhabited by Him, that Jesus holds sweet communion.¹

That art in the clefts of the rock,

Here she dwells; "her place of defence is the munitions of rocks" (Isa. xxxiii. 16). Here, hid with Christ in God,² safely she can contemplate *His* glory whom none can look upon and live.³ In the Son she

¹ "But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his" (Rom. viii. 9). "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? The temple of God is holy, which temple ye are" (1 Cor. iii. 16, 17). "What! know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Cor. vi. 19, 20).

² "For ye are dead, and *your life is hid with Christ in God*" (Col. iii. 3).

³ "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him" (John i. 18).

sees the Father.¹ In Him, and through Him, she may hold communion with God Himself.²

Thus was it with Moses, when he prayed, "I beseech thee, shew me thy glory. And he said, I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy. And he said, *Thou canst not see my face; for there shall no man see me and live.* And the LORD said, Behold, *there is a place by me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock: and it shall come to pass while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a cleft of the rock and will cover thee with my hand while I pass by: and I will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back parts; but my face shall not be seen*" (Exod. xxxiii. 18-23).

Thus was it with Elijah, when he fled from the fury of Jezebel to that same Horeb, *the Mount of God*: "And he came thither unto a cave, and lodged there; and, behold, the word of the LORD came to him, and he said unto him, What doest thou here, Elijah? And he said, I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword: and I, I only, am left; and they seek my life to take it away. And he said, Go forth, and *stand upon the mount before the LORD.* And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces

¹ "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, is he who hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. iv. 6).

² "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John xiv. 9).

the rocks before the LORD; but the LORD was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice. And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that *he wrapped his face in his mantle* and went out, *and stood in the entering in of the cave*. And behold, there came a voice unto him, and said, What doest thou here, Elijah?"

Not only does the smitten Rock afford shelter, but from it flows the water of life wherewith she may continually quench her thirst. They "did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that went with them: and that Rock was Christ" (1 Cor. x. 4).

In the secret places of the stairs,

Twice in the Old Testament do we read of Christ as *secret*. When Manoah asked the angel of the LORD, "What is thy name, that when thy sayings come to pass we may do thee honour?" the angel said unto him, "Why askest thou thus after my name, *seeing it is secret*" (or wonderful)? (Judges xiii. 17, 18.)

When Jacob, after wrestling all night with a man, asked him, saying, "Tell me, I pray thee, thy name," he answered, "Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name? And he blessed him there" (Gen. xxxii. 29). Never since "the Word was made flesh," and became "God with us," has this name been used.

The secret places of the stairs are described in the temple of Solomon: "The door for the middle chamber was in the right side of the house: and they went up with winding stairs into the middle chamber, and out of the

middle into the third" (1 Kings vi. 8). It was probably here that Joash the king was hid six years from the fury of his grandmother. "When Athaliah, the mother of Ahaziah, saw that her son was dead, she arose and destroyed *all the seed of the kingdom*. But Jehosheba, the daughter of king Joram, sister of Ahaziah, took Joash the son of Ahaziah, and stole him from among the king's sons which were slain; and they hid him, him and his nurse, *in the bed-chamber* from Athaliah, so that he was not slain. And he was with her hid in the house of the LORD six years" (2 Kings xi. 1-3; 2 Chron. xxii. 10-12).

Thus Christ invites His people to hide: "Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast" (Isa. xxvi. 20). He is Himself our hiding-place. "*Thou art my hiding-place; thou shalt preserve me from trouble; thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance*" (Ps. xxxii. 7). "Thou art my hiding-place and my shield: I hope in thy word" (Ps. cxix. 114).

Let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice,

Thus He invites her to "look up:"¹ to "lift up her eyes."²

¹ "Hearken unto the voice of my cry, *my King and my God*: for unto thee will I pray. My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O LORD; in the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and *will look up*" (Ps. v. 2, 3).

² "*I will lift up mine eyes* unto the hills, from whence cometh my help" (Ps. cxxi. 1). "Unto thee lift I up mine eyes, O thou that dwellest in the heavens. Behold, as the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters, as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress; so our eyes wait upon the LORD our God, until that he have mercy upon us" (Ps. cxliii. 1, 2).

He loves to hear her voice,¹ not only in prayer but in praise. Prayer and praise should accompany each other. "*In everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God*" (Phil. iv. 6).

Beautifully does the Psalmist represent all creatures waiting upon (looking unto) God, and being satisfied. Surely the redeemed of the Lord should not be wanting in thanksgiving! "Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the LORD, O my soul, and *forget not all his benefits*" (Ps. ciii. 1, 2). "Let Israel rejoice in him that made him; let the children of Zion be joyful in their king" (Ps. cxlix. 2).

For sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance comely.

Sweet in prayer is her voice, for "the prayer of the upright is his delight" (Prov. xv. 8). Sweet in praise, for the Spirit saith, "Rejoice in the LORD, O ye righteous: praise is comely for the upright" (Ps. xxxiii. 1). When thus raised in prayer and praise, the meek and quiet spirit (so beautiful in His sight) meets His loving eye. Her countenance is indeed at such times comely with the ornaments wherewith He has adorned her.

Ver. 15. *Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines: for our vines have tender grapes.*

These foxes are spoken of by Ezekiel: "O Israel, thy prophets are like the foxes in the deserts. Ye have not gone up into the gaps, neither made up the hedge for the house of Israel to stand in the battle in the day of the LORD" (Ezek. xiii. 4, 5). They are called "foolish

¹ "Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me" (Ps. l. 15). And in the preceding verse, "Offer unto God thanksgiving."

prophets, that follow their own spirit, and have seen nothing" (ver. 3). Instead of stopping, they made gaps, by which enemies entered into the vineyard of the Lord. The Saviour applies the name "fox"¹ to Herod, and that crafty monarch did his best to stifle the teaching of our Lord, and to set Him at nought.

As wolves to the flock, so are foxes to the vineyard. Our Saviour foretold of their coming: "False Christs and false prophets shall rise, and shall shew signs and wonders, to seduce, if possible, even the elect" (Mark xiii. 22). Peter warns against them: "But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of" (2 Pet. ii. 1, 2). "There shall come in the last day scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming?" (2 Pet. iii. 3, 4.) And John tells us to "try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world" (1 John iv. 1). They are very numerous;² they lie in holes, and thus conceal themselves till the tender grape is spoiled.³

¹ When told that Herod would kill Him, His answer was, "Go ye, and tell that fox, Behold, I cast out devils, and I do cures to-day and to-morrow, and the third I shall be perfected" (Luke xiii. 32). He warned His disciples to beware of the leaven of Herod (Mark viii. 15); meaning thereby his dangerous insidious doctrines: He spoke "*not of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine*" (Matt. xvi. 12).

² "And Samson went and caught three hundred foxes" (Judges xv. 4).

³ "The foxes have holes" (Matt. viii. 20).

It is when they are little we should take them ; then they are liable to enter unperceived. Their nature is the same whatever may be their size, and if not taken when little, it will be by and by more difficult to expel them. "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump" (1 Cor. v. 6).

*The little foxes creep in unawares.*¹ With cunning craftiness they lie in wait to deceive.² They beguile with things which have indeed a show of wisdom,³ though not the wisdom that is from above, and which is *first pure*.⁴ They love foolish questions and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law : which are unprofitable and vain (Tit. iii. 9).

Early in the Christian Church they began to work, and have been doing immense mischief ever since.⁵

¹ "For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation ; ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ" (Jude 4).

² "Be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive" (Eph. iv. 14).

³ "Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility, and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind ; and not holding the head. . . . Which things" (ordinances after the commandments and doctrines of men) "have indeed a show of wisdom in will-worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body" (Col. ii. 18, 23).

⁴ "The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy" (James iii. 17).

⁵ "For the mystery of iniquity doth already work : only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way ; and then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming : even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan, with all power, and signs, and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish ; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved" (2 Thess. ii. 7-10).

"This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come.

Well did Paul by the Spirit charge Timothy, "Take heed unto thyself and unto the doctrine" (1 Tim. iv. 16). Foreseeing perilous times, when foxes should "creep into houses," he reminds him of the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make him wise unto salvation.

This faithful watchman about to resign his trust¹ solemnly warns his successor of impending danger. How fearful when the watchmen are blind, or dumb, or ignorant, or slothful!² But even if faithful, we must remember that it is with the vineyard as with the city,—"Except the LORD keep it, the watchmen waketh but in vain" (Ps. cxxvii. 1).

These foxes spoil the grapes. Amongst the Seven Churches of Asia Minor, the grapes of Pergamos, Thya-

For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, truce-breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, *lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.* For of this sort are they which *creep into houses*, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts, ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth" (2 Tim. iii. 1-7).

"*The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables*" (2 Tim. iv. 3, 4).

"But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned. And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee *wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus*" (2 Tim. iii. 14, 15).

¹ "For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand" (2 Tim. iv. 6).

² "His watchmen are blind; they are all ignorant, they are all dumb dogs, they cannot bark; sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber; yea, they are greedy dogs, which can never have enough, and they are shepherds that cannot understand; they all look to their own way, every one for his gain from his quarter" (Isa. lvi. 10, 11).

tira, and Laodicea suffered ; while Ephesus, Smyrna, and Philadelphia had hard fight to keep out the foxes ; and Sardis seemed wearied out with the effort.¹

The King and Bride speak of *our* vines. If they be indeed the Lord's planting, they cannot be utterly destroyed ; but the grapes are tender. It is the fruit which may be injured, for "the word" of these false prophets "eats as doth a canker" (2 Tim. ii. 17).

The tender grapes at Corinth were spoiled, so that Paul could not speak unto the Corinthians as "unto spiritual, but as unto carnal." The grapes which should have nearly reached perfection were stunted in growth, and brought disappointment to the faithful labourer in the vineyard.²

In the Corinthian Church, the knowledge that puffeth up had made these dangerous teachers welcome.

Let us look to it that on our foundation, Christ, we build with good material, lest Tobiah's sneer prove prophetic : "Even that which they build, if a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall" (Neh. iv. 3).

How sad the lamentation of Jeremiah, and how alarmingly like the state of the Church at the present time ! "*Because of the mountain of Zion, which is desolate, the foxes walk upon it*" (Lam. v. 18).

It is zeal for His Father's glory³ which makes our King so urgent in the command, in which with heart and voice the Bride unites, "Take us the foxes, the

¹ The account of the Seven Churches is full of solemn warning, and should be prayerfully studied.

² Want of growth in grace and knowledge should stir us up to seek to discover its cause, and to bring cause and disease alike to the great Physician.

³ Jesus says His Father is glorified not only by our bearing much fruit, but by our bearing fruit which shall remain. We read in Jude of "trees whose fruit withereth."

little foxes, that spoil the vines : for our vines have tender grapes."

Ver. 16. *My beloved is mine, and I am his ;*

When the foxes have been thoroughly expelled, the Church realizes her complete union with Christ, that union of which marriage is the type (Eph. v. 22-33).

"*My beloved is mine.*"—God "gave him, head over all, to the church" (Eph. i. 22).

"*I am his.*" "And ye are Christ's" (1 Cor. iii. 23).

It is this union which in a professedly Christian Church doubles the guilt of idolatry. It is not merely worshipping and serving the creature, as do the heathen. It is the faithlessness of a woman, "beloved of her friend, yet an adulteress" (Hos. iii. 1).

He feedeth among the lilies.

The sons of God by adoption, those whom "the world knoweth not," but whom "he is not ashamed to call brethren." Amongst them *He feeds*, for has He not said, "If any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me"? (Rev. iii. 20.) The lilies were his chosen companions while on earth, and He still dwelleth amongst them by His Spirit.

Ver. 17. *Until the day break,*

It was *till daybreak* Jacob wrestled.¹ It is still night,² but the Church looks forward to the dawn,³ when

¹ "And he said, Let me go, *for the day breaketh*. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me" (Gen. xxxii. 26).

² "The night is far spent, the day is at hand" (Rom. xiii. 12).

³ "Until the day dawn, and the day-star arise in your hearts" (2 Pet. i. 19).

the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing beneath His wings (Mal. iv. 2).

And the shadows flee away,

To her the things visible are shadows : " For we are strangers before thee, and sojourners, as were all our fathers ; our days on the earth are as a shadow, and there is none abiding " (1 Chron. xxix. 15). " Surely every man walketh in a vain show ; surely they are disquieted in vain ; he heapeth up riches, and knoweth not who shall gather them " (Ps. xxxix. 6). Life itself is in her eyes " but a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away " (James iv. 14). She walks by faith, not by sight (2 Cor. v. 7). To the world, on the contrary, present things are the substance : " Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years ; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry " (Luke xii. 19). While the Christian's daybreak is to her as the shadow of death, darkness, " and not light, even very dark and no brightness in it " (Amos v. 18-20). *The Church knows the shadows will flee away.* Faith speaks here and lays firm hold of the promise, " Yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry " (Heb. x. 37). She is " not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." She knows that " the Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness ; but is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance " (2 Pet. iii. 8, 9). Till then, " abide with me."

Turn, my beloved, and be thou like a roe or a young hart upon the mountains of Bether (division).

What divisions (like great mountains) separate the people of God ! “Whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men ? For while one saith, I am of Paul, and I of Apollos ; are ye not carnal ?” (1 Cor. iii. 3, 4.) What disputes for pre-eminence, like those of the disciples, before the Spirit was poured forth at Pentecost ;¹ and which only the Master’s presence could quell.

If our King could be seen above all, how small and insignificant would appear many of the things which Christians now make subjects of dispute and division ! These mountains should be *means* by which the Saviour approaches His people, and manifests Himself unto them ; *not stumbling-blocks*, whereby a brother may be caused to fall.² “If we be risen with Christ,” they will all lie in their proper places, beneath Him, and beneath us : but if we hold not “the Head,” they will appear above Him, and hide Him from our view. Thus Paul feared it would be with the Colossians, who were *subject* to ordinances (that is, used them as the end, not as the

¹ “And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest. And he said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them ; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. *But ye shall not be so*” (Luke xxii. 24-26).

² “Let us not therefore judge one another any more : but judge this rather, that no man put a stumbling-block, or an occasion to fall, in his brother’s way.” “For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink ; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost” (Rom. xiv. 13, 17). “Whether therefore ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God. Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God : even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved” (1 Cor. x. 31-33).

means); and with the Galatians, who turned back to the weak and beggarly elements whereunto they desired again to be in bondage.

The Bride's prayer is, that Christ may be seen *above all*, hastening towards her with all the eagerness of Infinite, Eternal Love. "Surely I come quickly; Amen." "Even so, come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. xxii. 20).

CHAPTER III.

VER. 1. *By night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loveth :*

THOUGH it was night she was one of the children of the light and of the day.¹ To her it is double night when He (her light) is absent.² With her soul she desires Him in the night (Isa. xxvi. 9), *but it is on her bed*, and "the soul of the sluggard desireth and hath nothing" (Prov. xiii. 4). "The desire of the slothful killeth him" (Prov. xxi. 25).

It is not thus He must be sought.³ "Woe to them that are at ease in Zion" (Amos vi. 1). "Tremble, ye women that are at ease" (Isa. xxxii. 11).

She had forgotten the warning, "that ye be not slothful." She was neglecting to give all diligence to make her calling and election sure; and now "*she is blind, and cannot see afar off*" (2 Pet. i. 9, 10).

I sought him, but I found him not.

Her idle soul suffers hunger.

¹ "Ye are all the children of the light, and the children of the day" (1 Thess. v. 5).

² "I am the light of the world : *he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness*" (John viii. 12).

³ "If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God" (Prov. ii. 4, 5). "He that lacketh these things (spiritual progress) is blind, and cannot see afar off." Wherefore, give diligence, etc.

Ver. 2. *I will rise now,*

For "*now* is the accepted time ; *now* is the day of salvation" (2 Cor. vi. 2). She overcomes her sloth, and obeys the Divine command to "*go forward.*"¹ Her resolve is, "*I will rise now*"

And go about the city :

The city of Zion ; the city of our God and King.² It is there He is to be sought and found : for "in Judah is God known ; his name is great in Israel. In Salem also is his tabernacle, and his dwelling-place in Zion" (Ps. lxxvi. 1, 2). Her soul, cast down within her, pants after Him : "As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God : when shall I come and appear before God ?" (Ps. xlii. 1, 2.)

*In the streets and in the broad ways I will seek him
whom my soul loveth :*

"The slothful saith, There is a lion without, I shall be slain in the streets" (Prov. xxii. 13 ; xxvi. 13). Her anxiety to find Christ overcomes both her indolence and her fear.

She bethinks herself of the Divine command, "Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your soul" (Jer. vi. 16).

"Now the city was large and great ; but the people were

¹ "Wherefore criest thou unto me ? Speak unto the children of Israel that they go forward" (Exod. xiv. 15).

² "Mount Zion, the city of the great King. God is known in her palaces for a refuge" (Ps. xlviii. 1, 3). "Jerusalem ; it is the city of the great King" (Matt. v. 35). Perhaps she seeks in the ordinances of religion for her lost assurance.

few therein, and the houses were not builded" (Neh. vii. 4.) Here she prosecutes her search. But though He is found of them that sought Him not,¹ she still laments,

I sought him, but I found him not.

He "standeth at the top of high places, by the way in the places of the paths;" He "crieth at the gates, at the entry of the city, at the coming in at the doors" (Prov. viii. 1-3). He "crieth without;" He "uttereth" His "voice in the streets, in the chief place of concourse, in the openings of the gates, in the city" (Prov. i. 20, 21). Yet she finds Him not. It is to those without He calleth thus.² By her His voice is not heard in the streets.³ When He speaketh to her, His voice is "still" and "small."

She is a child and must bear the Father's chastening; for what child is he whom the father chasteneth not? (Heb. xii. 7.)

Therefore she goes forward, but he is not there; and backward, but she cannot perceive him: on the left hand, where he doth work, but she cannot behold him: he hideth himself on the right hand, that she cannot see

¹ "I am sought of them that asked not for me; I am found of them that sought me not; I said, Behold me, behold me, unto a nation that was not called by my name" (Isa. lxi. 1).

² This is evident from Wisdom's address: "How long, *ye simple ones*, will ye love simplicity? and *the scorers* delight in their scorning, and *fools* hate knowledge?" (Prov. i. 22.) And in Prov. viii. 4, 5 she says her voice is to *the sons of men*. "O *ye simple*, understand wisdom; and *ye fools*, be ye of an understanding heart."

³ "He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street" (Isa. xlii. 2; Matt. xii. 19). Paul, telling of his conversion, said those with him "*heard not the voice of him that spake to me*" (Acts xxiii. 9). In Acts ix. 7 it says, "*hearing a voice.*" They heard only a sound, and could not distinguish words.

him (Job xxiii. 8, 9). Yet the promise is sure: "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you" (Matt. vii. 7).

It is the *sense of His presence* which is gone. "With him is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (James i. 17). He is really near, but her eyes, like those of the disciples of Emmaus, "are holden." All the while He knoweth the way that she takes: when He hath tried her, she shall come forth as gold (Job xxiii. 10). She has proved the way of the slothful to be an hedge of thorns, and soon she will prove that "the soul of the diligent shall be made fat" (Prov. xiii. 4). Already she has lifted up the hands that hang down, and the feeble knees, and by and by the peaceable fruits of righteousness will appear (Heb. xii. 11, 12).

Ver. 3. *The watchmen that go about the city found me :*

These watchmen are men appointed by God to warn the wicked and the righteous. Some are set upon the watch-tower¹ to declare what they see, and what the LORD will say to them; some upon the walls of Jeru-

¹ "Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me" (Ezek. iii. 17; xxxiii. 7). "Thus hath the LORD said unto me, Go, set a watchman, let him declare what he seeth. And he saw a chariot with a couple of horsemen, a chariot of asses, and a chariot of camels; and he hearkened diligently with much heed: and he cried as a lion, My lord, I stand continually upon the watch-tower in the day-time, and I am set in my ward every night" (whole nights), Isa. xxi. 6-8. "I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved. And the LORD answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it" (that he that readeth may run, i.e. make haste and proclaim it), Hab. ii. 1, 2.

salem,¹ to sound the silver trumpets² for a remembrance before the LORD, for a memorial before your God. These never hold their peace day nor night. They are "the LORD's remembrancers."

The watchmen call the solemn assembly: they sound an alarm: and their trumpets must give no uncertain sound; for, if they do, "who shall prepare himself for battle?" (1 Cor. xiv. 8.) The character of the true watchman is thus described by Malachi: "The law of truth was in his mouth, and iniquity was not found in his lips: he walked with me in peace and equity, and did turn many away from iniquity. For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts" (Mal. ii. 6, 7).

We have a reverse to this picture drawn by the same

¹ "I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace day nor night: ye that make mention of the LORD" (that are the LORD's remembrancers) "keep not silence, and give him no rest, till he establish, and till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth" (Isa. lxii. 6, 7).

² "And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Make thee two trumpets of silver; *of a whole piece* shalt thou make them: that thou mayest use them for the calling of the assembly, and for the journeying of the camp." Strict directions were given as to the blowing of these trumpets. The sound of the two trumpets called all the congregation to the door of the tabernacle. The sound of one gathered "the princes." One alarm sent the eastern part of the camp forward: a second alarm sent the southern. The simple blowing brought the congregation together. The alarm sounded by both announced war: "*If ye go to war in your land against the enemy that oppresseth you, then ye shall blow an alarm with the trumpets; and ye shall be remembered before the LORD your God, and ye shall be saved from your enemies. Also in the day of your gladness, and in your solemn days, and in the beginnings of your months, ye shall blow with the trumpets over your burnt-offerings, and over the sacrifices of your peace-offerings, that they may be to you for a memorial before your God: I, the LORD your God*" (Numb. x. 1-10. It was the sons of Aaron, the priests, who were appointed to blow with the trum-

Divine hand. The Spirit who spoke thus by Malachi also spoke by Ezekiel: "Woe to the shepherds¹ of Israel that do feed themselves! should not the shepherds feed the flocks? Ye eat the fat, and ye clothe you with the wool, ye kill them that are fed: but ye feed not the flock. The diseased have ye not strengthened, neither have ye healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up that which was broken, neither have ye brought again that which was driven away, neither have ye sought that which was lost; but with force and with cruelty have ye ruled them. And they were scattered!" (Ezek. xxxiv. 2-5.)

May the Spirit of God bring home, with searching power, these passages to many hearts!

The watchmen mentioned by the Bride *went about the city*. This was their business: to "walk about Zion, and go round about her; to tell the towers thereof: to

pets. In the rebuilding of Jerusalem, he that sounded the trumpet stood by Nehemiah, who warned the people "in what place they heard the sound of the trumpet" to resort thither, adding, "Our God shall fight for us" (Neh. iv. 18, 20). Jeremiah calls on Judah and Jerusalem to blow the trumpet in the land, in order to assemble the people for war (Jer. iv. 5); and Joel exclaims, "Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain; for the day of the LORD cometh." And again, "Blow the trumpet in Zion, sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly: gather the people," etc. (Joel ii. 1, 15, 16.)

¹ The watchmen and shepherds are the same. As in Isa. lvi. 11, 12, it is said, "His watchmen are blind," "ignorant," "dumb," "loving slumber," "shepherds that cannot understand." "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers" (Acts xx. 28). "Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind. Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock" (1 Pet. v. 2, 3). "They watch for your souls as they that must give account" (Heb. xiii. 17). Paul says of a bishop, "If a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?" (1 Tim. iii. 5.)

mark well her bulwarks, to consider her palaces" (Ps. xlviii. 12, 13). They were overseers of the flock, watching for souls, as they that must give account: taking care of the Church of God.

These watchmen *found her*. If they would resemble their Master, they must seek that which was lost, they must bring again that which was driven away, and bind up that which was broken, and strengthen that which was sick: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing.

To whom I said, Saw ye him whom my soul loveth?

She never changes that expression. It is still "him whom my soul loveth." It is her greatest grief that she cannot see him. Her feelings resemble those of Mary as she stood without at the sepulchre weeping. The cause of her grief is the same: "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him" (John xx. 11-13). The language of her soul is, "Wherefore hidest thou thy face, and holdest me for thine enemy?" (Job xiii. 24,) but "though he slay me, yet will I trust in him" (Job xiii. 15).

It was but a little that I passed from them, but I found him whom my soul loveth:

"It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the LORD" (Lam. iii. 26). "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end. Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you. And ye shall seek me, and find me when ye shall search for me with all your heart" (Jer. xxix. 11-13):

She says, "*I passed from them.*" However faithful they were, *she must go further.* Man can do no more than say, "Behold the Lamb of God!" Jesus alone can restore to her the joy of her salvation;¹ and she must find Jesus for herself. He may be very near, as He was to Mary in the garden; to the disciples walking to Emmaus; and yet she cannot see Him unless He manifests Himself to her.

It was but a little while that, passing *beyond man*, she finds the Lord Himself; so true is it that He "said not unto the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me in vain" (Isa. xlv. 19).

I held him,

She clings to Him as Ruth to Naomi;² as the women to their risen Lord.

And would not let him go,

In fervent, soul-stirring prayer she holds Him, and will not let Him go until He bless her. Likewise the Spirit also helpeth her infirmities; for she knoweth not what to pray for as she ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for her according to the will of God. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God (Rom. viii. 26, 27).

¹ Thus David prayed when the sense of his sin made him feel cast out from the presence of God (Ps. li. 11, 12).

² "Entreat me not to leave thee, to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: where thou diest will I die, and there will I be buried: the LORD do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me" (Ruth i. 16, 17). "And they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him" (Matt. xxviii. 9).

Until I had brought him into my mother's house,

She had felt for herself, as Paul for the Galatians, when he said, "My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you" (Gal. iv. 19); therefore she looks back to her origin, and to the time when she had received "the Spirit of adoption." She has found Him, of whom through negligence she had lost sight, and must renew her vows. "If thou return to the Almighty, thou shalt be built up, thou shalt put away iniquity far from thy tabernacles." "Then shalt thou have thy delight in the Almighty, and shalt lift up thy face unto God. Thou shalt make thy prayer unto him, and he shall hear thee, and thou shalt pay thy vows" (Job xxii. 23, 26, 27). Her joy is that of the disciples when they saw the Lord after His resurrection. "I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you" (John xvi. 22). "Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord" (John xx. 20).

The Bride brought Him not only into her mother's house, but (as she states)

Into the chamber of her that conceived me.

She goes back to the first principles of the oracles of God, to the time when her dead soul was born again, and received spiritual life. Her spirit returns to its sanctuary, Christ.¹ *In Him God meets her soul, and restores to her the joy of salvation.* It is with a soul about to be born again, as it was with the child restored to life by Elijah.² It must be brought by the great Prophet

¹ "He shall be for a sanctuary" (Isa. viii. 14). "Yet I will be to them as a little sanctuary" (Ezek. xi. 16).

² The restoration to life of the Gentile widow's son is recorded, 1 Kings xvii. 17-24.

into His chamber, and laid upon His bed, and the Prophet must go in, *and shut the door upon them twain. Then He comes into contact with that soul, and His Spirit gives it life.* And so with the Christian who has lost sight of assurance; and with the Church which has left its first love. She must put herself into the hands of Him who forgiveth all her iniquities, and healeth all her diseases. She must be buried with Him by baptism into death, that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so she also must walk in newness of life (Rom. vi. 3-8).

She is the child of promise,¹ and she must look to the rock whence she was hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence she was digged, unto Abraham her father, and unto Sarah that bare her (Isa. li. 1, 2); and recall the time when she first received the message to leave all to follow Christ, and to become a stranger and pilgrim on the earth.²

In that chamber she seeks grace to walk worthy of her high calling, and never again to let go the hope "which maketh not ashamed."

Ver. 5. *I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes, and by the hinds of the field, that ye stir not up, nor awake my love till he please.*

And as in the new birth she was alone with Him; so in this renewal of her vows: and even those who

¹ "Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise" (Gal. iv. 28).

² It was the faithful reception of that message to leave all and follow God's directions, which marked Abraham as the father of all who believe. It is necessary that the Bride should look back to Abraham and Sarah (the parents of the child of promise), and recall that the law of the new birth is "to follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth."

know and love Him must not intermeddle with her joy. She dreads the least interruption : all must stand aside, and every voice be hushed "till He please."

Ver. 6. Who is this that cometh out of the wilderness

Her close communion with Christ restores all things to their proper places, and puts everything in its proper light. "*Who is this that cometh out of the wilderness?*" "They that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country" (Heb. xi. 14). This is not her rest (as a short time before she had seemed to imagine), *because it is polluted*. It is "the wilderness"—the "great and terrible wilderness," wherein are fiery serpents, scorpions, and drought" (Deut. viii. 15). She remembers all the way by which the LORD her God led her ; yet she exclaims, not with Balaam, "How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, thy tabernacles, O Israel !" (Num. xxiv. 5), but, "*Who is this that cometh out of the wilderness?*"

Like pillars of smoke?

These pillars of smoke mark "the Church in the wilderness,"¹ *and it is because of them she is coming out* led by the pillar of cloud.² By faith she sees in the court, those continual sacrifices "offered year by year," types of the one great atonement which alone can take away sin :³ and within the holy place, the incense per-

¹ Stephen, in addressing the Jews, said, "This" (Moses) "is he that was in the church in the wilderness" (Acts vii. 38).

² "And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way" (Exod. xiii. 21). The account of the various and unceasing offerings is given in Lev. i. ii. iii. iv. viii. ix., etc.

³ "It is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sin" (Heb. x. 4). "We are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (ver. 10).

petually burning on the altar of gold.¹ Within the holiest (type of heaven²), she sees once a year sweet incense put upon burning coals of fire, that the cloud may cover the mercy-seat. It is this incense which causes her prayers to be heard and answered.³

In the sacrifices, she sees the perfect offering of her Saviour: in the burning incense, His ceaseless intercession.⁴

These pillars of smoke are

Perfumed with myrrh and frankincense,

She knows that perfume is put before the testimony,⁵ where God meets His servant: but she cannot smell that. It is for the LORD alone. How sweet it is to the Almighty to meet with man in Christ: to know that the only begotten Son has made it possible for Him (holy and above all adoration though He be) to hold converse with His poor fallen creatures, we can never tell. The memory of what Christ has done for man is

¹ "Aaron shall burn thereon sweet incense every morning" (Exod. xxx. 7).

² "Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, the figures of the true; but into heaven itself" (Heb. ix. 24).

³ "And he" (Aaron) "shall put the incense upon the fire before the LORD, that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy-seat that is upon the testimony, that he die not" (Lev. xvi. 13). "There was given unto him" (the angel) "much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel's hand" (Rev. viii. 3, 4).

⁴ "Christ . . . who also maketh intercession for us" (Rom. viii. 34). "He ever liveth to make intercession for them" (Heb. vii. 25).

⁵ In Exod. xxx. 34-35 we read of a perfume tempered together, pure and holy, which was to be beaten very small, and put before the testimony, in the tabernacle of the congregation, where God would meet with Moses. It was *most holy*; and altogether for the LORD. *Any imitation was to be punished by death.*

ever before the Father. If it were not, we dare not meet Him in prayer.

In the ointment which anointed the tabernacle, both altars, and all the vessels, there was of pure myrrh five hundred shekels. In it she perceives her consecration, purification, and preservation in Christ. The frankincense was put upon the meat-offering; and the priest offered the whole of it to the LORD, an offering made by fire, of a sweet savour unto Him.¹

It is remarkable that in the offering for jealousy *no frankincense was to be used*: "for it is an offering of jealousy, an offering of memorial, *bringing iniquity to remembrance*" (Num. v. 15). In the frankincense the Bride's faith may recall the promise, "their sins and iniquities will I remember no more" (Jer. xxxi. 34, quoted Heb. viii. 12).

Thus she cometh out of the wilderness in obedience to the command, "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty" (2 Cor. vi. 17, 18). Thus she cometh out of the wilderness, because the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world has redeemed her; because in Him she is set apart, purified, and preserved; because for His sake her sins have been blotted out, and she can come boldly to the throne of grace, knowing that she is accepted in the Beloved: because *He not only*

¹ In the meat-offering of fine flour, the command was to pour oil upon it, and put frankincense thereon. Aaron's sons were to take "a handful of the flour thereof, and of the oil thereof, with *all* the frankincense thereof, to burn on the altar." In the meat-offering of the first-fruits, *all* the frankincense was also to be burnt to the LORD (Lev. ii.)

died for her sins, and was raised for her justification, but also ever liveth to make intercession for her.

She comes out on no uncertainty. There is no *perhaps* in God's dealings with her. With confidence she can point to her salvation as *devised* by Him, and say, "These pillars of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, testify that God has purposes of mercy towards me ; that He will bring me to the purchased possession ; that it is He, and He alone, who bringeth me out of the wilderness."

In Christ, this Church in the wilderness is supplied freely

With all the powders of the merchant.

Besides the pure myrrh and frankincense were principal spices, sweet cinnamon, sweet calamus, and cassia in the ointment, compound after the art of the apothecary : and in the holy perfume, stacti, onycha, and galbanum, with pure frankincense, *beaten very small*. We do not comprehend why each of these things was required, but when God condescended to order it so, and even to regulate the exact proportions of each, we may well believe they signified some important element in the great work which all the Jewish ordinances prefigured—salvation of sinners by means of the great Mediator.

We know that *with Christ* (the bundle of myrrh) God will freely give us all things. We know that the invitation is, "He that hath no money, come and buy" (Isa. lv. 1). We may recall His warning to the Laodicean Church : "Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing ; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and

poor, and blind, and naked; I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eye-salve that thou mayest see" (Rev. iii. 17, 18).

The first thing He counsels this Church to buy is "gold tried in the fire:" that "fear of the LORD" which is "the beginning of wisdom," and which, if any man lack, "let him ask of God, who giveth to all liberally."¹ If thou return to the Almighty, "thou shalt lay up gold *as dust*, and the gold of Ophir as the stones of brooks" (Job xxii. 24).

The merchandise of this Merchant is indeed better than the merchandise of silver, and what is gained from Him is preferable to fine gold. From Him you may buy the truth, wisdom, instruction, and understanding.² All the valuables of earth are not to be compared to His stores, for "in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung that I may win Christ, and be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ" (Phil. iii. 7-9).

¹ "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not. But let him ask in faith" (James i. 5, 6).

² "Buy the truth and sell it not; also wisdom, and instruction, and understanding" (Prov. xxiii. 23). He says of Himself, "*I am the truth*" (John xiv. 6).

It is of this inexhaustible fulness treasured up in Christ, that King Lemuel speaks, when he says of the virtuous woman (the Bride), "She is like the merchants' ships, *she bringeth her food from afar.*" "*She perceiveth that her merchandise is good*" (Prov. xxxi. 14, 18).

The spices *do not belong* to the wilderness. They are brought from far, from the place of balm—Gilead¹ (the Hill of Witness).

From the wilderness, the Bride turns to contemplate a place of rest—

Ver. 7. *Behold his bed, which is Solomon's :*

As an infant, the Prince of Peace was laid in a manger: in after life, He had not where to lay His head: in death, He was laid in a new sepulchre, wherein was never man yet laid. "Behold the place where they laid him!" (Mark xvi. 6.) "Come, see the place where the Lord lay" (Matt. xxviii. 6). And all this He submitted to in order that He might *purchase rest* for the Church (His body); *that He might be enabled to make that Church His dwelling-place through the Spirit.*

Thus, when the Jews departed from the mount of the

¹ In Genesis xxxvii. 25, where the brothers plotted against Joseph, it is mentioned that a company of Ishmaelites *came from Gilead*, with their camels bearing "*spicery, and balm, and myrrh,*" going to carry it down to Egypt. In Jeremiah viii. 22 the prophet asks, "*Is there no balm in Gilead? is there no physician there? why, then, is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?*" Again he says (chap. xli. 11), "*Go up into Gilead, and take balm, O virgin, the daughter of Egypt; in vain shalt thou use many medicines; for thou shalt not be cured.*" When we compare this with the Saviour's words, "Ye will surely say to me this proverb, Physician, heal thyself" (Luke iv. 23), and remember that even from His garment went virtue to heal one who touched it in faith, we may see a chain of coincidences so strange as to compel us to believe that the Bible cannot be the word of man, but is in truth the Word of God.

LORD, three days' journey, the ark (symbol of the Divine presence) went before them *in the three days' journey, to search out a resting-place for them* (Num. x. 33).

When the children of Israel dwelt in Canaan, the ark was (after some time) brought and placed in the city of David, the stronghold of Zion.¹ "This mount Zion wherein thou hast dwelt" (Ps. lxxiv. 2), of which He said, "This is my rest for ever: here will I dwell, for I have desired it" (Ps. cxxxii. 14).

As the ark rested in Zion in the time of David, so Jesus rests amongst His people now; but the rest of David is not the final rest: for it is *rest in the midst of*

¹ The ark (to which the mercy-seat was united) seemed to typify the Lord Jesus. The Jews always associated the ark with the presence of God. This is evident from David's anxiety about it. "See now," he said to Nathan, "I dwell in an house of cedar, but the ark of God dwelleth within curtains." That night the word of the LORD came unto Nathan, saying, "Go and tell my servant David, Thus saith the LORD, *shalt thou build me an house for me to dwell in?* Whereas I have not dwelt in any house since the time that I brought up the children of Israel out of Egypt, even to this day, *but have walked in a tent and in a tabernacle*" (2 Sam. vii. 2, 4-6). In Psalm lxxxiv. David addressed the Shepherd of Israel as "*Thou that dwellest between the cherubim.*" And in 2 Sam. vi. 2 we are told David arose to bring up from Baale "the ark of God, whose name is called by the name of the LORD of hosts *that dwelleth between the cherubim.*" The city of Zion, the resting-place of the ark, had once belonged to the enemies of David; but being part of the promised inheritance, it could not be kept from him. He took the castle of Zion, which is the city of David, and dwelt in the castle, and built the city around it. Previous to this the people of Israel had come to David, and, reminding him that they were his bone and his flesh, recalled to him the promise of the LORD, that he should feed his people Israel and be a captain over them (2 Sam. v. 1-7). In exactly a similar manner has Christ won for Himself a dwelling-place in the midst of His people. In just such a way should the people whom Christ is not ashamed to own as brethren (whom He has declared to be members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones), plead before Him the promises of God, and entreat Him (their Shepherd and Commander), to take to Himself His great power, and reign in their hearts, and subdue all His enemies.

war. The rest the Church looks forward to is a better rest; the rest typified by the reign of Solomon, when "nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall men learn war any more." Perhaps the Bride thinks of this when she exclaims, "Behold his bed, which is Solomon's." The final resting-place of the ark was in the Temple of Solomon.¹ The reign of Solomon prefigures a time of peace which has not yet been realized on earth: but Jesus (the Prince of Peace) has already appeared, and brought to the true undoubt-

¹ It is interesting to note how strikingly the prophecies respecting Solomon, and those respecting Christ, resemble one another. Thus it was said of Solomon, "Upon David, and upon his seed, and upon his house, and upon his throne, shall there be peace for ever from the LORD" (1 Kings ii. 33). In Psalm lxxii. (where David beheld the glories of the reign of Solomon foreshadowing the far greater glories of the reign of Christ) it is said, "In his days shall the righteous flourish; and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth" (ver. 7). The whole Psalm forms a most interesting and instructive study to the believer. Of Solomon it was said, "Behold, a son shall be born to thee (David), who shall be a man of rest; and I will give him rest from all his enemies round about: for his name shall be Solomon (peaceable), and I will give peace and quietness unto Israel in his days" (1 Chron. xxii. 9). Of Jesus it was prophesied, "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice, from henceforth even for ever" (Isa. ix. 6, 7). "And this (this promised Child) shall be the peace" (Micah v. 5). This Prince of Peace gives peace to His people even now: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth give I unto you" (John xiv. 27). "These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace" (John xvi. 33). He proclaims peace through the blood of the cross. "Peace, peace to him that is far off, and to him that is near" (Isa. lvii. 19). This "man of rest" offers rest to all who come to him: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls" (Matt. xi. 28, 29).

ing believer a peace which passeth all understanding. His kingdom is in the process of establishment. It is within us ; a kingdom of "righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost" (Rom. xiv. 17). "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given ; and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end" (Isa. ix. 6, 7).

Whatever ideas we may form of this kingdom (and we are apt to be very dogmatic on the subject), one thing is certain, that the peace shall be such as we have only glimpses of now ; that it shall be broad, deep, full, ever fresh, ever flowing, never exhausted ;—*peace like a river*.¹ "*Behold his bed, which is Solomon's.*" The more exclusively our whole selves, bodies, souls, and spirits are ruled over by Christ, the greater is *our peace*, and the nearer we approach *the perfection of rest* which remaineth for the people of God, *the mystical body of Christ*. But this peace is apt to be disturbed, this rest broken at this present time. "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth ; I came not to send peace, but a sword" (Matt. x. 34).

For this reason, when the Bride exclaims, "Behold his bed, which is Solomon's," she adds,

Threescore² valiant men are about it, of the valiant of Israel.

There is a guardianship much alluded to in Scripture. We are told (Ps. xxxiv. 7) that "the angel of

¹ "For thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will extend peace to her like a river, and the glory of the Gentiles like a flowing stream" (Isa. lxvi. 12).

² It is curious that the number mentioned is the number of the captains who went down to the rock to David, into the cave of

the LORD encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them ;” for, “ Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation ?” (Heb. i. 14.) As they ministered to the Head so they minister to the members. We read in all the Gospels how they guarded the place where lay the body of the Lord, and how they strove to turn the disciples’ thoughts from the dead Jesus to the living Jesus, from His death to His resurrection.

Even Satan spoke of this guardianship of the Son of God (as Head of the Church) when he applied to Him the prophecy of David, “ He shall give his angels charge concerning thee : . . . and in their hands they Adullam, and of those who joined him in Ziklag ; for it appears that there were two sets of captains, thirty in each band. The account of the first thirty is given, 1 Chron. xi. 15, to end. The account of the second thirty we have in the following chapter.

Still more curious is it, that in the departure from Egypt, and the entrance into Canaan, the children of Israel being twelve tribes, went up “ five in a rank,” “ marshalled by five ” (Exod. xiii. 18 ; Josh. i. 14 ; marginal reading in both).

The soles of the feet of the priests who bore the ark, resting in the waters of Jordan, while all the people passed over on dry ground into the promised land, might well typify Christ’s presence with His people who are buried with Him by baptism into death. The whole Church is thus buried, while each individual is passing on to rest.

The beauty of this passage is more apparent when we recall the promise given to the mediator, Moses, for the people, “ Every place that the sole of your foot shall rest upon, that have I given unto you ” (Josh. i. 3, quoted from Deut. xi. 24). Thus the believer need fear no evil, for to his Mediator, Christ, is promised for him possession of all things, and victory over all enemies, even *the last*. The passage of Jordan by the twelve tribes marshalled by five, and the passage of Jordan by David’s captains (it does not seem certain that all the sixty took part in it), was *at harvest-time*, when Jordan overfloweth all its banks. The passage of Jordan is related in Joshua iii.

The rest of Christ with His people *going down into Jordan*, is as remarkable as the rest of Christ amongst His people in the Tabernacle at Shiloh or the Temple at Jerusalem.

shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone" (Matt. iv. 6). The ministry of angels formed one of the solaces of our Saviour's sojourn on earth. When the devil left Him, "behold, angels came and ministered unto him" (Matt. iv. 11). And in that night of agony in Gethsemane, "there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him" (Luke xxii. 43).

Full of interest is the statement made by our Lord, that in heaven the angels of His "little ones" do always behold the face of His Father which is in heaven (Matt. xviii. 10).

The rest of the Church on earth is guarded (like Jacob) by angels of God, ascending and descending, *because* of Jesus the Way, and *by means* of Jesus the Way. If our eyes could be opened like those of Elisha's servant, how little cause would we see for fear in the malice and revenge of our enemies. "His servant said unto him, Alas, my master! how shall we do? And he answered, Fear not; for they that be with us are more than they that be with them. And Elisha prayed, and said, LORD, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the LORD opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw; and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha" (2 Kings vi. 14-17).

These ministering spirits who stand around the bed of Solomon are our fellow-servants, and of our brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of the book of God (Rev. xxii. 9). They are of the valiant of Israel—princes of God.¹ One of these princes is

¹ "Thy name shall be called Israel (a prince of God): for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed" (Gen. xxxii. 28).

named in Daniel and Revelation. A certain man whose appearance corresponded with that of the Lord Jesus (in Rev. i.) spoke to Daniel, telling him not to fear, that he had come in answer to his prayers, that he had been greatly withstood by the prince of the kingdom of Persia, but (he added), "Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me," and in the close of the interview he states, "there is none that held with me in these things but Michael your prince" (Dan. x. 5-21). In Dan. xii. 1 we read that "in the last days shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people," and in Rev. xii. 7, 8 we are told that "there was war in heaven; Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon fought, and his angels, and prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven." Thus do these princes of God guard the rest of God's people, and fight against the great enemy of man.

Ver. 8. *They all hold swords, being expert in war.*

They not only *have* swords, but *hold* them. They keep in readiness to attack or to defend. They cannot be surprised. The sword which they hold is doubtless "the sword of the Spirit,"¹ which is "quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the

¹ The sword of the Spirit is part of the Christian armour (Eph. vi. 17), which believers are exhorted to put on *because they wrestle not against flesh and blood*, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against wicked spirits in heavenly places. In our Saviour's conflict with Satan (recorded Matt. iii. 1-10), He invariably answered him from the Word of God. In Rev. ii. 12-16 He addresses the Church of Pergamos, as "he which hath the sharp sword with two edges," with which He would fight against their false prophets.

thoughts and intents of the heart" (Heb. iv. 12). "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds" (2 Cor. x. 4). This was the weapon used by our Saviour in His conflict with Satan; and with it He fights against false prophets, and smites the nations. Thus David prays Him to prepare for war: "Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O most Mighty, with thy glory and thy majesty" (Ps. xlv. 3): and, in fact, when seen by John in Patmos, a sharp two-edged sword proceeded out of His mouth. This sword is also called "the spirit of his mouth," "the breath of his lips," "the rod of his mouth."¹ It is represented as two-edged. To some it is the savour of death unto death; to others the savour of life unto life (2 Cor. ii. 16). With it God's people conquer, for they overcame "by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony" (Rev. xii. 11): and in this way the great prince Michael contended with the devil; for this archangel, "when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses" (probably the old Jewish dispensation, of which Moses was the visible head), "durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, *The Lord rebuke thee*" (Jude 9).

¹ "And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth" (2 Thess. ii. 8). "He shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked" (Isa. xi. 4). "And his breath, as an overflowing stream, shall reach to the midst of the neck to sift the nations with the sieve of vanity" (Isa. xxx. 28).

"Out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword" (Rev. i. 16). "Let the high praises of God be in their mouth, and a two-edged sword in their hand" (Psa. cxlix. 6). In Rev. xix. 15, where Christ advances to smite the nations, the two edges are not mentioned. It may be because the day of mercy will then be past, and the Word will be no longer a savour of life.

These valiant men (of the valiant of Israel) are expert in war. This expertness is by reason of *use*. The weak are unskilful in the word of righteousness.¹ St. Paul speaks of some who handle this sword deceitfully, as did Satan in his wily attacks upon Christ.² And Peter complains that some who are unlearned and unstable wrest it to their own destruction;³ because of this Paul warns us to "let the word of Christ dwell in us richly in all wisdom" (Col. iii. 16); and it is part of the whole armour which the Christian is exhorted to put on, to enable him to stand in the evil day. God's servants (as well on earth as in heaven) carry this sword.

Every man hath his sword upon his thigh, because of fear in the night.

As in rebuilding the city of Jerusalem; "They which builded on the wall, and they that bare burdens, with those that laded, every one with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon. For the builders, every one had his sword girded by his side, and so builded" (Neh. iv. 17, 18).

¹ "Every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, those who by reason of use (or *an habit*), have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil" (Heb. v. 13, 14). "We are not as many, which corrupt (deal deceitfully with) the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God, speak we in (of) Christ" (2 Cor. ii. 17).

² In quoting Ps. xci. 11, 12, Satan omitted an essential portion. "He shall give his angels charge over thee," he left out "to keep thee in all thy ways."

³ "As also in all his" (Paul's) "epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other Scriptures, unto their own destruction." The remedy he gives is, "Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. iii. 16, 18).

There seems to be a very beautiful allusion in "*the sword upon the thigh*." Our minds are carried back to the mysterious struggle of Jacob with the Unknown. "And when he" (the Unknown) "saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with him" (Gen. xxxii. 25). We know not how it is with the angels; but we know that the earthly guardians¹ of *the peace of Jerusalem (the bed of Solomon)* have felt the finger of God laid on them, to make them feel their utter weakness; and after agonizing and long-continued prayer have risen "lame, to take the prey;" and to become "princes of God." And we conceive that with *every creature* (and the angels are but creatures), *a sense of weakness imparted by constant communion with God, must be the fittest preparation for warfare with the powers of darkness.*

There is nothing conduces so much to the preservation of peace, as the sword girded on the thigh. "Watch ye, and pray, lest ye enter into temptation" (Mark xiv. 38). "Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might" (Eph. vi. 10). "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee" (Ps. cxxii. 6).

Where we see little danger or cause for fear, the Lord and the angels see much: and therefore hath every one of this guard the sword girded on the thigh, "*because of fear in the night*." During the darkness of this world, till the Sun of Righteousness arise, we wrestle

¹ The earthly guardians of the bed of Solomon are the watchmen upon the walls of Jerusalem, who never hold their peace day nor night. They are set apart by God, and evidently have a large portion (for human beings) of the spirit of Christ—being constant and faithful in prayer.

(not against flesh and blood, but) against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against wicked spirits in heavenly places (Eph. vi. 12). We need to be both "sober and vigilant," because our "adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about" (in the darkness of night, and favoured by that darkness) "seeking whom he may devour" (1 Pet. v. 8).

Ver. 9. *King Solomon made himself a chariot of the wood of Lebanon.*

King Solomon, "Prince of Peace, King of Glory,"¹ made *himself* a chariot, for "he saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor; therefore his arm brought salvation unto him; and his righteousness it sustained him" (Isa. lix. 16). "He made himself of no reputation" (Phil. ii. 7); *and it was Himself* He made a chariot (or bed).

"The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels" (Ps. lxxviii. 17): but "he took not on him the nature of angels; he took on him the seed of Abraham" (Heb. ii. 16). He took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of man (Phil. ii. 7). He was "fearfully and wonderfully made," "made in secret," curiously wrought in the "lowest parts of the earth" (Ps. cxxxix. 14, 15). When Mary asked the angel, "How shall this be?" the answer given her was this: "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; therefore also that holy thing which

¹ "Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle. Who is this King of glory? The LORD of hosts, he is the King of glory" (Ps. xxiv. 7-10).

shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God" (Luke i. 35).

This chariot was of *the wood of Lebanon ; the material of which His temple was built.* "He was made in the likeness of man," and "found in fashion as a man." "Forasmuch as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same ; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." "The Word was made flesh ;" and "being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Phil. ii. 8). Thus He made Himself a chariot of salvation¹ to His people : as is said in tenth of Hebrews : "Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not ;" "Then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. By the which will we are sanctified, through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once." "For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified" (ver. 5, 7, 10, 14).

The incorruptibility of the body He assumed is spoken of in Acts : "His soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption" (Acts ii. 31).

It was *the King* who made this chariot. It was *His own work from first to last.* He planned and He carried out the whole design, which was declared complete when the Saviour said, "It is finished : and bowed his head, and gave up the ghost" (John xix. 30).

¹ In Hab. iii. the question is asked, "Was the LORD displeased against the rivers? was thine anger against the rivers? was thy wrath against the sea, that thou didst ride upon thy horses, thy chariots of salvation?" "Thou wentest forth for the salvation of thy people, for salvation with thine anointed" (ver. 8-13).

Ver. 10. *He made the pillars thereof silver,*

The pillars on which it stood and on which it was borne up.¹ In Scripture a pillar is constantly used as a witness.² Thus in the covenant made between Jacob and Laban, Jacob took a stone and set it for a pillar; and then he and his brethren gathered stones and made an heap. This heap was called by Laban "Jegar-sahadutha," and by Jacob "Galeed:" both names signifying, in the different languages of the two parties, "the heap of witnesses." Laban calling Jacob's attention to both pillar and heap, said, "This heap be witness, and this pillar be witness" (Gen. xxxi. 44-52). Again, when Joshua³ made a covenant with the people that

¹ And Samson took hold of the two middle pillars *upon which the house stood, and on which it was borne up*" (Judg. xvi. 29).

² In Gen. xix. 26 we read of Lot's wife becoming a pillar of salt; a witness of the dreadful anger of God against those who having escaped the pollutions of the world, through the knowledge of the Lord Jesus, are again entangled therein and overcome; being of those who draw back unto perdition.

In Gen. xxviii. 18-22 we have Jacob setting up the stone (his pillow) for a pillar; a witness of what God had done for him, and of the obedience he resolved to tender to God. When he returned to that place (once Luz, now Beth-el), he set up a pillar in the place where God talked with him; a witness to the faithfulness of a covenant-keeping God (Gen. xxxv. 14). In Exod. xxiv. 4 we have Moses erecting twelve pillars (one for each tribe); witnesses that the people had resolved to do all the words which the LORD had said. In 2 Sam. xviii. 18 we have Absalom rearing for himself a pillar, because he had no son to keep his name in remembrance. In 1 Sam. vii. 12 we have Samuel taking a stone, and setting it up as a witness, that hitherto the LORD had helped them. This stone he called Eben-ezer. In Isa. xix. 19, 20, we have the prophecy, that there shall be in the midst of the land of Egypt an altar, "and a pillar at the border thereof to the LORD. And it shall be for a sign and for a witness unto the LORD of hosts in the land of Egypt."

The pillar of cloud by day, and of fire by night, were *witnesses* to the children of Israel of God's presence with them.

³ The stone raised by Joshua is spoken of (Josh. xxiv. 22-27). It is called "the pillar in Shechem" (Judg. ix. 6).

they would serve the LORD only, he set up a stone as a witness. This stone was called the pillar of Shechem.

The pillars of the chariot made by Solomon (supports and witnesses to His work) were *silver*.¹ "By understanding hath he established the heavens" (Prov. iii. 19).

"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge" (Prov. i. 7).

"The knowledge of the holy is understanding" (Prov. ix. 10).

"To depart from evil is understanding" (Job xxviii. 28).

In order that man might know God, fear God, and depart from evil, Christ came upon earth. He alone knew God; He alone revered God as God should be revered; He alone fully kept the law which is holy, just, and good.

Of Him it was prophesied that "the Spirit of the LORD should rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, *the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD*" (Isa. xi. 2). "*By his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many*; for he shall bear their iniquities" (Isa. liii. 11). "His arm brought salvation unto him; and *his righteousness, it sustained him*" (Isa. lix. 16).

No man can say with Jesus, "As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father" (John x. 15). No human being can enter into the reverence of soul which inspired the words, "I honour my Father" (John viii. 49). None could court the inquiry, "Which of you convinceth me of sin?" (John viii. 46).

And as this knowledge and this righteousness sus-

¹ See on Cant. i. 11, where the frequent comparison of silver to understanding, and gold to wisdom, is fully noticed.

tained and bore up this wonderful chariot, so they were its pillars. Had there been the smallest taint of sin, the whole design must have failed ; but His being without sin enabled Him to bear our sins in His own body on the tree (1 Pet. ii. 22-24). Being separate from sinners, enabled Him to save sinners.¹

His words and works evidenced His divinity,—two witnesses which even His enemies could not gainsay.

He made Himself a chariot of the wood of Lebanon, and He made the pillars thereof *silver*, that He might receive sinners and bring them to God !

The bottom thereof gold,

“Wisdom is the principal thing” (Prov. iv. 7), therefore it forms the ground² or bottom of this chariot of salvation. Christ is our wisdom ; and “other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.”

When we come to Christ, we find the wisdom of man to be foolishness with God ;³ and we have to take Jesus as all our wisdom, *our alone ground of dependence*. On Him our feet must rest as on a rock.⁴

The covering thereof purple :

This colour signified riches, honour, exaltation, and kingly power.⁵

¹ “For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens” (Heb. vii. 26).

² In Ezekiel xliii. 14 we read (leaving out the italics), “And from the bottom, *the ground*, to the lower settle, two cubits.”

³ “For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God” (1 Cor. iii. 19).

⁴ He “set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings” (Ps. xl. 2).

⁵ In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, the rich man was “clothed with *purple* and fine linen” (Luke xvi. 19). When honour

In Numbers iv. 13 we read, "*They shall take away the ashes from the altar, and spread a purple cloth thereon.*" The Lamb has been slain, the sacrifice accepted, the ashes removed; and now instead of ashes beauty is given,¹ and the brazen altar is covered with the purple cloth.

"This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses" (Acts ii. 32). Him hath God exalted with his right hand a Prince and a Saviour (Acts v. 31). He "who, being in the form of God, took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross," is for this cause² highly exalted by God, and given "a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things on earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. iii. 6-11). "We see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, by the suffering of death crowned with glory and honour" (Heb. ii. 9).

When John beheld a door opened in heaven, he saw *not a brazen altar, but a throne*:³ "And lo, in the midst

was done to Mordecai he "went from the presence of the king in royal apparel of blue and white, and with a great crown of gold, and with a garment of fine linen and *purple*" (Esther viii. 15). The kingly robe put on our Saviour was purple, as stated by John and Mark (John xix. 2, 5; Mark xv. 17); it is called scarlet by Matthew (xxvii. 28); and was said by Luke to be gorgeous (xxiii. 11).

¹ It was one of the purposes (mentioned by Isaiah) for which Christ came, to give to His people "beauty for ashes" (Isa. lxi. 3).

² The language in Phil. iii. 9 is, "*wherefore* God also hath highly exalted him."

³ The whole of this vision in heaven, from the door being opened to the opening of the first seal, is to be found in Rev. iv. and v.

of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood *a Lamb, as it had been slain.*" After these living creatures and elders had fallen down before the Lamb, and attributed to Him the glory of their redemption, John heard the voice of many angels (ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands), saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them" were heard "saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever."

Thus has the altar of sacrifice been for ever converted into a throne.

Let us see how the Old Testament foreshadowed the manner in which this exaltation of Christ as Prince and Saviour affected His people. We read that when the brazen altar was thus covered by a purple cloth, Aaron and his sons were to put upon it "all the vessels thereof"—"all the vessels of the altar, and they shall spread upon it a covering of badgers' skins, and put to the staves of it." Thus concealed from the observation of the world, these vessels were carried through the wilderness; as is said of the vessels of mercy, chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, He "hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Eph. ii. 6).

In 1 Kings vii. 45-47 we are told of the vessels made for the house of the LORD: "All these" were of "brass made bright, or scoured." "In the plain of Jordan did

the king cast them, in the clay ground between Succoth and Zarthan. And Solomon left all the vessels unweighed, because they were *exceeding many*: neither was the weight of the brass found out." *The altar and the vessels placed upon it were of the same metal. All had passed through the furnace.*

And so with the vessels of honour which God has prepared for glory. All must undergo the baptism of fire,¹ in the clay ground, between the place where they became pilgrims and strangers on earth, and their entrance into rest.

Why do we shrink from this furnace? Why do we not more completely surrender ourselves into the hands of Him who has promised, "When thou passest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee" (Isa. xliii. 2.) "Whom the

¹ John said, "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire" (Matt. iii. 11). When the mother of James and John sought that her sons might have the highest places in Christ's kingdom, our Saviour answered, "Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? They say unto him, We are able. And he saith unto them, Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with" (Matt. xx. 20-23). Repentance (the baptism of water by the Spirit) is but the first step in the heavenward way; and therefore it precedes the crucifixion with Christ; as the preaching of John prepared for the coming Saviour. It appears from Scripture that repentance (or change of mind) is the Spirit's *turning the sinner to Christ for salvation*, and without this repentance man cannot see the kingdom of heaven. The baptism of fire appears to be *the leading of the Spirit in the ways of Christ*, and consequently often in ways *completely crossing the inclination of the flesh and maxims of the world*. It is seeking to avoid *this baptism* which causes the inconsistencies and waverings of Christians. It is remarkable that Succoth was the place where Jacob in his journeyings to Canaan made *booths* for his cattle (Succoth means *booths*), and *an house* for himself: thus show-

Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is there whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons" (Heb. xii. 6-8). Doth not our light affliction, which is but for a moment, work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory? (2 Cor. iv. 17.) When all have entered the glorious inheritance, will they not appear "a great multitude, which *no man could number*, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues"?

The midst thereof being paved with love, for the daughters of Jerusalem.

Christ was "God manifest in the flesh."¹

God was "in Christ reconciling the world unto himself."²

ing his pilgrimage position, and his expectation of a place of rest. These truths are beautifully illustrated in the appointment of the Feast of Tabernacles, when the children of Israel were to take goodly boughs, and to dwell in booths for seven days. "*All that are Israelites born shall dwell in booths*" (Lev. xxiii. 39-43). "That your generations may know that I made the children of Israel to dwell in booths, when I brought them out of the land of Egypt." And as at Succoth, they confess themselves strangers and pilgrims looking for rest, so at Zarthan (Zaretan) they pass over to take possession of that rest. It came to pass when the people removed from their tents to pass over Jordan (the priests bearing the ark having previously entered the river), "the waters which came down from above stood and rose up upon an heap *very far from the city Adam, that is beside Zaretan* : and those that came down toward the sea of the plain, the salt sea, failed, and were cut off : and the people passed over on dry ground, and all the people passed over *right against Jericho*" (Josh. iii. 13-16).

¹ "And without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness : God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory" (1 Tim. iii. 16).

² "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them" (2 Cor. v. 19).

The midst of this chariot is paved with *love*, for "*God is love.*" On whatever side the daughters of Jerusalem look, there is nothing to be seen but *Love*. Love *beneath* them; for on Christ they rest. Love *above* them; for Christ is above, and *the banner over them is Love*. Love on *all sides* of them; for has He not promised, "I will be to her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of her"? (Zech. ii. 5.)

Every incident in the wondrous life of Jesus was paved with love for the daughters of Jerusalem. "Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end" (John xiii. 1).

Every event, great or small, in His life, and in that of His people, forms a net-work of Love. Complicated it now appears, and we cannot clearly trace out the meaning, but *the pattern has been ordered by Him who is Love, and who cannot err.* "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Rom. viii. 28).

So impressed was John, after beholding the glories of Revelation, with the love which ordered all, that, on being commanded to write, he bursts into an acclamation of praise, "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen" (Rev. i. 5, 6).

Ver. 11. *Go forth, O ye daughters of Zion, and behold king Solomon with the crown wherewith his mother crowned him in the day of his espousals, and in the day of the gladness of his heart.*

It is a command, and a command to the daughters of Zion, towards whom, though now suffering great

affliction, God has purposes of mercy. "I have likened the daughter of Zion to a comely and delicate woman. The shepherds with their flocks shall come unto her: they shall pitch their tents against her round about; they shall feed every one in his place. Prepare ye war against her; arise, and let us go up at noon. Woe unto us! for the day goeth away, for the shadows of the evening are stretched out! Arise, and let us go by night, and let us destroy her palaces" (Jer. vi. 2-5). "Be in pain, and labour to bring forth, O daughter of Zion, like a woman in travail: for now shalt thou go forth out of the city, and thou shalt dwell in the field, and thou shalt go even to Babylon; *there shalt thou be delivered; there the LORD shall redeem thee from the hand of thine enemies*" (Micah iv. 10). She is told to *go forth, and behold King Solomon*. Once the Prince of Peace, the Man of Rest, *came to her*, wearing no crown, but sitting on an ass's colt,¹ meek and lowly. Then she called Him King, and owned Him Son of David: but His kingdom was not of this world, and the peace He brought was not accepted by the world. It was received by but a few,—*"a little flock,"*—and the great multitude was roused to war. Jews and Gentiles united to crown Him with thorns, and array Him in royal apparel, saluting

¹ "Tell ye the daughter of Zion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt, the foal of an ass" (quoted from Zech. ix. 9). "And the multitude that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the Highest" (Matt. xxi. 1-9, and recorded in Mark xi. 1-10; Luke xix. 29-38; John xii. 12-16). It is evident the Jews then believed that Jesus was about to ascend the throne of David, and restore the earthly kingdom to Israel. Luke and John both state their calling Him "King;" and Mark says they shouted, "Blessed be the kingdom of our father David, that cometh in the name of the Lord!"

Him as King in mockery. But the humiliation of Jesus is at an end; and *now* the daughters of Zion are invited and commanded to go forth and behold him, "with the crown wherewith his mother crowned him in the day of his espousals."

We know that He is gone into a far country, to receive for Himself a kingdom, and to return;¹ but by faith we see Him who was "made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour." We must *go forth*, if we would see Him thus. It is only those whose faith leads them to follow Christ, and leave the world, who *can* see the King in His beauty: and behold the land which is very far off.²

His people are His crown. "Thou shalt also be a crown of glory in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God" (Isa. lxii. 3). "They shall be as the stones of a crown, lifted up as an ensign upon his land" (Zech. ix. 16). When all the "jewels" are collected together, then shall the crown be lifted up as an ensign.³

¹ "He added, and spake a parable, because he was nigh to Jerusalem, and because they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear. He said therefore, A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return," etc. (Luke xix. 11, 12.)

² "Thine eyes shall see the King in his beauty: they shall behold the land that is very far off" (Isa. xxxiii. 17).

³ "Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another; and the LORD hearkened and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels (special treasure); and I will spare them as a man spareth *his own son that serveth him*. Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked; between him that serveth God, and him that serveth him not" (Mal. iii. 16-18).

When John saw Him at the close of the Revelation (Rev. xix. 12), "on his head were many crowns," but the verse in Canticles refers to *the espousals* (not the marriage), to the betrothal in the wilderness: for He declares, "I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her (to her heart)." And then turning to her, He says, "I will betroth thee unto me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving-kindness, and in mercies. I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness; and thou shalt know the LORD" (Hos. ii. 14, 19, 20).

"Go, and cry in the ears of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith the LORD, I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land not sown" (Jer. ii. 1).

Thus Paul strives to stir up the Corinthian Church, by reminding them that he was jealous over them with godly jealousy: for he had espoused them to one husband, that he might present them "as a chaste virgin to Christ" (2 Cor. xi. 2).

With this crown *his mother* crowns him.

We read in 1 Kings i. 11-48 that at the close of David's reign, the mother of Solomon went unto the king, and informing him of the usurpation of Adonijah, and reminding him of his promise that Solomon should sit upon his throne, never rested till the promise was fulfilled, and the crown set upon the head of Solomon. Then Solomon was proclaimed king, and the servants coming to bless King David, said, "God make the name of Solomon better than thy name, and make his throne greater than thy throne."¹

¹ The whole of this scene is not only a remarkable one in the

Of Christ, as David (the beloved, the man of war), it was said, "I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain" (Isa. xlix. 4).

Of Christ, as Solomon (the Prince of Peace, the Man of Rest), it was prophesied, "He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied" (Isa. liii. 11).

We are taught to pray, "Thy kingdom come :"¹ and ~~God~~ God has set watchmen upon the walls of Jerusalem, who never hold their peace day nor night; and who have received the command from Him to keep not silence, and to give Him no rest till He establish and make Jerusalem a praise in the whole earth: that is, till the crown of the Prince of Peace be complete by the ingathering of all His jewels, and His glorious reign of uninterrupted peace begin.

But who is Christ's mother? He has Himself told us: "Who is my mother, or my brethren? And he looked round about on them which sat about him, and said, Behold my mother, and my brethren! *For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother*" (Mark iii. 33-35).

Again, in Luke viii. 21 we are told He said, "My mother and my brethren are *those which hear the Word of God, and do it.*"²

Amongst the mysteries revealed to John at Patmos,

history of the Jewish nation, but also appears to be a magnificent prophecy of future events relating to the Church and the Church's King.

¹ It was in answer to the petition, "Lord teach us to pray," that this prayer was taught (Luke xi. 1-4). It was also given from the Mount (Matt. vi. 9-13).

² There is a passage similar to this in Matt. xii. 46-50. These remarkable words were elicited by His earthly mother and brethren desiring to speak with Him, whilst He was engaged in the all-important work of His heavenly Father.

"there appeared a great wonder sign) in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars" (Rev. xii. 1).

This woman was *the mother*, and these stars *the crown*, wherewith she crowned her Son and Saviour.

She was clothed with—"THE SUN."

For, "The LORD God is a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory" (Ps. lxxxiv. 11).

Jesus is "the Sun of Righteousness" (Mal. iv. 2)—

"THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS" (Jer. xxiii. 6).

And the Church is commanded,

"Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. xiii. 14); and

"Let thy priests be clothed with righteousness" (Ps. cxxxii. 9).

Therefore the prophet sings, "I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God: for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness" (Isa. lxi. 10).

God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day,"—and she is "*of the day; therefore she is clothed with the Sun.*"

Under her feet—THE MOON: the faithful witness in heaven.¹

Jesus is "the faithful witness" (Rev. i. 5).

God says—"Behold, I have given him a witness to the people" (Isa. lv. 4).

And His own statement is,

"I am one that bear witness of myself" (John viii. 18).

¹ Speaking of His covenant with David, God said, "It shall be established for ever as the moon, and as a faithful witness in heaven" (Ps. lxxxix. 37). The covenant to all the seed is as secure as Christ Himself.

"He, being the brightness of God's glory, and the express image of his person" (Heb. i. 3), yet "made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant" (Phil. ii. 7), *that He might be the light which shineth in darkness* (John i. 5).

Thus He became "the lesser light to rule the night" (for it is night): and was made "a little lower than the angels."

As *man*, He said of Himself, "My Father is greater than I" (John xiv. 28).

God's people are clothed in the righteousness of God, and they rest upon "God manifest in the flesh" (1 Tim. **iii.** 16).

For "other foundation can no man lay" (1 Cor. **iii.** 11).

He has delivered their soul from death; will He not deliver their feet from falling, that they may walk before God in the light of the living? (Ps. lvi. 13.)

"He will keep the feet of his saints" (1 Sam. ii. 9).

He "holdeth our soul in life, and suffereth not our feet to be moved" (Ps. lxvi. 9).

The prayer of the true Church ever is, "Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe" (Ps. cxix. 117).

When the *marriage* of the Lamb is come, there is no need of the sun, neither of the moon; for then the Bride, united to her husband, will need no type to remind her of Him whom her soul loveth.

And as the Church of God has put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and rests upon Him alone, so she bears upon her head (Christ) *a crown of twelve stars*—the crown wherewith she crowned Him "in the day of his espousals, and in the day of the gladness of his heart."



These stars are the angels, or ministering spirits of the Churches.¹

In Job, the Lord speaks of the morning-stars as the sons of God, who rejoiced in His works.²

The stars which form this crown are the spiritual seed of faithful Abraham,³ whose seed was to be as the stars for multitude. They are the sons of God by adoption, of whom Daniel says, that "they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness, as the stars for ever and ever" (Dan. xii. 3).

Of these stars, as well as those in the material heavens, it may be said, He telleth their number; "he calleth them all by their names" (Ps. cxlvii. 4). "He calleth them all by names, by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power; not one faileth" (Isa. xl. 26).

Yet though so numerous, he classes them (in this crown) into twelve. As in Rev. vii. the 144,000 are divided into twelve, for the twelve tribes of Israel, so these, the spiritual descendants of the twelve apostles,⁴ are counted as twelve stars.

The Church is now in the wilderness; but on her head (Christ) rests the crown, not yet visible to the

¹ "The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches" (Rev. i. 20). "Are they not all ministering spirits?" (Heb. i. 14.)

² "Who laid the corner-stone thereof (of the earth), when the morning-stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?" (Job xxxviii. 6, 7.)

³ "To the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham, *who is the father of us all*." "And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed" (Gal. iii. 29).

⁴ "For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel" (1 Cor. iv. 15).

world: "for the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God" (Rom. viii. 19).

The day of His espousals was the day of the gladness of His heart.

For the joy that was set before Him, He endured the cross, despising the shame (Heb. xii. 2). God, His God, hath anointed Him with the oil of gladness above His fellows (Ps. xlv. 7).

This seems to be the time seen by John (Rev. iv. 10, 11), when "the four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created."

CHAPTER IV.

VER. 1. *Behold, thou art fair, my love ; behold, thou art fair ; thou hast doves' eyes within thy locks.*

THE King calls attention to the beauty, the fairness of the Bride ; that beauty which is His own work—*for her, and in her.*

Specially He dwells with pleasure on the spiritual discernment ; the gift of God in Christ through the Divine Spirit. "The Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true" (1 John v. 20). "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John iii. 3). "No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost" (1 Cor. xii. 3).

This spiritual discernment seemed specially pleasing to the Saviour when on earth. When Simon Peter declared him to be "the Christ, the Son of the living God, Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona : for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven" (Matt. xvi. 16, 17). Again, when upbraiding the cities which had seen His mighty works, and repented not, He exclaimed, "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed

them unto babes" (Matt. xi. 25). It is the child-like surrender of the eyes of the understanding into His charge and control that evidences how completely she is His.

These doves' eyes are *within her locks*. The locks prove her to be a Nazarite, separated unto the Lord, holy unto the Lord.

We read in Numbers vi. 2-8 : "When either man or woman shall separate themselves to vow a vow of a Nazarite, to separate themselves unto the LORD ; he shall separate himself from wine and strong drink, and shall drink no vinegar of wine, or vinegar of strong drink, neither shall he drink any liquor of grapes, nor eat moist grapes, or dried. All the days of his separation shall he eat nothing that is made of the vine-tree, from the kernels even to the husk. All the days of the vow of his separation there shall no razor come upon his head : until the days be fulfilled, in the which he separateth himself unto the LORD, he shall be holy, and shall let the locks of the hair of his head grow. All the days that he separateth himself unto the LORD he shall come at no dead body. He shall not make himself unclean for his father, or for his mother, for his brother, or for his sister, when they die ; because the consecration of his God is upon his head. All the days of his separation he is holy unto the LORD."

The locks prove that she has kept herself pure ; "hating even the garment spotted by the flesh" (Jude 23) ; that she has obeyed the command, "Be ye holy, for I am holy" (1 Pet. i. 16).¹

¹ The subject of Nazariteship will be entered on more fully when considering Cant. v. 11. The Church is set apart as holy, *because of the consecration of her head*—Christ. *For no consideration whatever*

In these locks lie her strength. Deprived of them, she would be weak as any other.¹ Well may the apostle ask, "Who maketh thee to differ? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive?" (1 Cor. iv. 7.)

Thy hair is as a flock of goats, that appear from (eat of) mount Gilead.

Her hair is a gift—given her for a covering; and is a sign that she is under the power of her husband. She needs covering: and *this covering* (typifying that she is subject to Christ) *is her glory*.

"But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God. A man indeed ought not to cover his head, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man. For the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man; neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man. For this cause ought the woman to have power on her head (a covering in sign that she is under the power of her husband) because of the angels. If a woman have long hair, it is a glory to

is she "to touch the unclean thing." "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the LORD, and touch not the unclean thing" (2 Cor. vi. 17). Her *touching* an unholy thing defiles her, but communicates no holiness to the thing she touches. "Ask now of the priests concerning the law, saying, If one bear holy flesh in the skirt of his garment, and with his skirt do touch bread, or pottage, or wine, or oil, or any meat, shall it be holy? And the priests answered and said, No. Then said Haggai, If one that is unclean by a dead body touch any of these, shall it be unclean? And the priests answered and said, It shall be unclean" (Hag. ii. 11-13). This seems forgotten in the present day.

¹ As with Samson, so with the Church. "I have been a Nazarite unto God from my mother's womb: if I be shaven, then my strength will go from me, and I shall become weak, and be like any other man" (Judg. xvi. 17).

her ; for her hair *is given her for a covering*" (or veil) (1 Cor. xi. 3, 7, 8, 9, 10, 15).

This hair is "*as a flock of goats.*" We read in Exodus **xxvi. 7**, "Thou shalt make curtains of goats' hair, to be a covering upon the tabernacle."

Goats' hair was amongst the offerings which, "who-soever was of a willing heart," was to bring unto the LORD :¹ "and all the women whose heart stirred them up in wisdom spun goats' hair" (Exod. xxxv. 26) ; "and the wise-hearted men made curtains of goats' hair for the tent over the tabernacle" (Exod. xxxvi. 14). *Thus Jesus has provided a covering for His people.*

By taking our nature upon Him, He has become our near kinsman (*one who has a right to redeem*) ; therefore we may entreat Him to spread His skirt over us.² He spreads His skirt over us in order to cover us, and then He enters into covenant with us, and we become His.³

This covering is the glory of the Church, "according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory *in the Lord*" (1 Cor. i. 31).

"God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of

¹ "This is the offering which ye shall take of them (for the tabernacle) ; gold, and silver, and brass, and blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine linen, and goats' hair" (Exod. xxv. 3, 4 ; xxxv. 6). The word hair is in italics, and the word goats', being in all these places followed immediately by *rams' skins*, it seems as if *goats' skins* were meant, and that the hair (removed from the skin after the animal's death) was spun. It is probable that the animal was slain in sacrifice, which would at once suggest the idea of the Great Sacrifice *slain in order to provide a covering for His people.*

² Thus Ruth pleaded with Boaz : "Spread therefore thy skirt over thine handmaid ; for thou art a near kinsman" (one that hath a right to redeem) (Ruth iii. 9).

³ "I spread my skirt over thee, and covered thy nakedness : yea, I swear unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee, saith the Lord God, and thou becamest mine" (Ezek. xvi. 8).

our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world" (Gal. vi. 14).

This hair is as a flock of goats that appear from (or eat of) Mount Gilead (the Hill of Witness). They are but a little flock, from whom all who are fearful or afraid have departed.¹ To them has come with Divine power the command, "Be not faithless, but believing" (John xx. 27). "Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might" (Eph. vi. 10). They have appropriated the promise, "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke xii. 32). Of Gilead (the Hill of Witness), we read that the place was a place for cattle, and was given to *the first-born of Manasseh*, the father of Gilead, because he was *a man of war*.² This Manasseh was so called by Joseph; "*for God*" (said he) "*hath made me forget all my toil, and all my father's house*" (Gen. xli. 51). Thus the king speaks to His Bride, "Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear; *forget also thine own people, and thy father's house*" (Ps. xlv. 10).

¹ When Gideon prepared by God's command to deliver Israel from the Midianites, the Lord objected to the army of Gideon that it was too numerous, and ordered Gideon to proclaim in the ears of the people, "*Whosoever is fearful and afraid, let him return and depart early from mount Gilead*" (Judg. vii. 3).

² We are told in Numbers xxxii. 1-5 that because the land of Jazer and the land of Gilead was a place for cattle, the children of Reuben and Gad desired it. When Joshua divided the land by lot, "there was also a lot for the tribe of Manasseh (for he was the first-born of Joseph); to wit, for Machir, the first-born of Manasseh, the father of Gilead; because he was *a man of war*, therefore he had Gilead and Bashan" (Josh. xvii. 1). In Obadiah 19 it is prophesied that "Benjamin" (the son of my right hand) "shall possess Gilead;" and in Zechariah x. 10 we read that God will bring his people into the land of Gilead and Lebanon, and place shall not be found for those who were once a "little flock." In Psalm lx. 7 God expressly says, "Gilead is mine, and Manasseh is mine."

This relinquishment of all earthly ties for the sake of Christ, this complete casting of herself on Him for protection and strength, this glorying in nothing save the cross of Christ, characterizes the little flock that appears from Mount Gilead. To them comes the promise, "I will bring Israel again to his habitation, and he shall feed on Carmel and Bashan, and his soul shall be satisfied upon mount Ephraim and Gilead" (Jer. l. 19).

Ver. 2. *Thy teeth are like a flock of sheep that are shorn, which came up from the washing;*

These teeth feed on the Word of God.

Of Judah it was prophesied, "His teeth shall be white with milk" (Gen. xlix. 12), "the sincere milk of the word," through which we are sanctified.¹ "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to thy word" (Ps. cxix. 9).

The proof of belonging to Christ's flock is, hearing His voice, knowing His voice.² The promise to such is, "They shall find pasture." "I will feed them in a good pasture, and upon the high mountains of Israel shall their fold be: there shall they lie in a good fold, and in a fat pasture shall they feed upon the mountains of Israel. I will feed my flock, and I will cause them to lie down, saith the Lord GOD" (Ezek. xxxiv. 14, 15).

These teeth are "like a flock shorn." As, when the atonement had been made, the leper (sprinkled with

¹ "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth" (John xvii. 17).

² "He that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice." "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me" (John x. 3, 4, 27).

the blood and pronounced clean) had to shave off all his hair, and wash himself in water, that he might be clean; and again on the seventh day, had to ~~shave~~ shave all the hair off his head, and his beard, and his eyebrows, even all his hair; and wash his clothes, and wash his flesh in water (Lev. xiv. 2-9); so with each member of Christ's flock. "Christ loved the Church, and gave himself for it; ~~that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word~~" (Eph. v. 25, 26).

Once the Church had minded earthly things, and gloried in her shame: now she puts off all these; she glories in Christ alone, and her conversation, her citizenship, is in heaven. Thus she is circumcised with "the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ" (Col. ii. 11). Being Christ's, she "crucifies the flesh, with the affections and lusts" (Gal. v. 24). She "mortifies her members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness which is idolatry" (Col. iii. 5).

The King speaks of the beauty of the flock *shorn, which came up from the washing*. The washing is frequently spoken of in Scripture. There is the washing of blood, and the washing of water: for Jesus Christ came "by water and blood; not by water only, but by water and blood" (1 John v. 6).

The only plea on which man enters heaven is "the blood." Hence the song of praise which commences Revelation: "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood" (Rev. i. 5), and the answer given by the elder to John, respecting the white-robed multitude: "These are they which came

out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (Rev. vii. 14). This blood is as efficacious now as when it was first shed. "If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John i. 7). Jesus has opened a fountain "to the house of David, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness" (Zech. xiii. 1).

The washing of regeneration, the baptism of water¹ (without which man cannot enter the kingdom of God) is the Spirit's application to the soul of the life and death of Jesus—the blood for pardon, the water for cleansing.

Thus the apostle, speaking of the impossibility of the unrighteous inheriting the kingdom of God, says, "And such were some of you; but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor. vi. 11). "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which he shed on us abundantly, through Jesus Christ our Saviour" (Tit. iii. 5, 6).

This washing is called "the washing of water by the word;" because it is *the Word* which the Spirit uses to point out our sins, and to show us how we ought to walk so as to please God. Were it not for the Word, and for the application of the Word by the Spirit, we should

¹ Literal water is not intended here, any more than literal blood when we speak of the blood of Christ. Could the application of the *literal* blood or *literal* water which flowed from Christ's side cleanse the soldier who pierced Him, and over whom it might have flowed? The Spirit of God alone could apply it with efficacy to his heart, and thus make him a new and a saved creature.

often appear to ourselves most fair, when we are *in ourselves*, by nature and practice, most corrupt.

It was in allusion to the continual washing which contact with the earth necessitates, that our Saviour washed His disciples' feet; explaining the act by the observation, "He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all" (John xiii. 10). Of this washing, Jesus said, "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me" (ver. 8).

Whereof every one bear twins, and none is barren among them.

Of this flock "*every one bear twins.*" The two natures struggling together characterize the child of God.

This seems foreshadowed in the birth of Esau and Jacob: "Isaac entreated the LORD for his wife, because she was barren: and the LORD was entreated of him, and Rebekah his wife conceived. And the children struggled together within her: and she said, If it be so, why am I thus? And she went to inquire of the LORD. And the LORD said unto her, Two nations are in thy womb, and two manners of people shall be separated from thy bowels, and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger. And when her days to be delivered were fulfilled, behold, there were twins in her womb. And the first came out red, all over like an hairy garment; and they called his name Esau. And after that came his brother out, and his hand took hold on Esau's heel; and his name was called Jacob" (Gen. xxv. 21-26).

In the memorable struggle recorded in the seventh of Romans we find Paul speaking thus, "I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me.

For I delight in the law of God after the inward man : but I see another law in my members warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am ! who shall deliver me from this body of death ! I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God ; but with the flesh the law of sin."

"That which is born of the flesh is flesh ; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again" (John iii. 6, 7).

"The first man is of the earth, earthy : the second man is the Lord from heaven. As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy ; and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly" (1 Cor. xv. 47-49).

The elder is hated of God ; the younger loved by Him. "As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated" (Rom. ix. 13).

"The carnal mind is enmity against God ; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be" (Rom. viii. 7).

The elder hates the younger, and ever seeks his destruction.

"Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing where-with his father blessed him : and Esau said in his heart, The days of mourning for my father are at hand, then will I slay my brother Jacob" (Gen. xxvii. 41).

"The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh : and these are contrary the one to the other" (Gal. v. 17).

The elder chooses present enjoyment, and despises the future inheritance. "Esau said, Behold, I am at the point to die; and *what profit shall this birthright do to me?* And he sold his birthright unto Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentiles; and he did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright" (Gen. xxv. 29-34).

He "for one morsel of meat sold his birthright." And "ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected; for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears"¹ (Heb. xii. 16, 17).

The younger supplants the elder, and relinquishes his present enjoyment that he may have a *title* to his father's blessing, "the inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away" (1 Pet. i. 4).

The elder must serve the younger, though much against his will.

"By thy sword shalt thou live, and shalt serve thy brother"² (Gen. xxvii. 40).

¹ Esau sought the blessing with tears, *still unrepentant of his evil choice*. To have their portion in this world, and to desire (when too late) a portion in the next, is but too common. "What is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matt. xvi. 26.)

² The blessing of Esau is very remarkable: "Behold, thy dwelling shall be the fatness of the earth, and of the dew of heaven from above." This accounts for what perplexed David, and still often perplexes the Christian. *The fatness of the earth is constantly the portion of the ungodly, and they participate in a great measure in the blessings of Christianity*,—social order, moral well-being, all the privileges which Christianity leads in its train. "He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matt. v. 45). The conclusion of the blessing is a sad one: "*And it shall come to pass when thou shalt have the dominion, that thou shalt break his yoke from off thy neck.*" God will not always strive with man. If the Spirit's voice is not listened to, the old nature may be allowed the ascendancy, and the Spirit may

"*Sin shall not have dominion over you* : for ye are not under the law, but under grace" (Rom. vi. 14).

In future times it shall be seen that "the supplanter" is a prince who has had power with God and with man, and has prevailed.

"He took his brother by the heel in the womb, and by his strength he had power with God" (was a prince, or, behaved himself princely) : "yea, he had power over the angel, and prevailed ; he wept, and made supplication unto him : he found him in Beth-el, and there he spake with us ; even the LORD God of hosts ; the LORD his memorial "¹ (Hos. xii. 3-5).

But there seems to be another thought contained in the words, "*none is barren among them.*" The great fruitfulness of those who delight in the law of the LORD is frequently spoken of in Scripture.

"Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor

cease for ever to strive, and leave man the victory, (and what a victory !) ending in his everlasting destruction.

¹ The prophecies relating to Esau open up a wide field of interesting research to the Bible student. God's sovereignty was apparent in the choice of Jacob as the father of the promised seed. "For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God, according to election, might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth ; it was said unto her (Rebekah), The elder shall serve the younger" (Rom. ix. 11, 12). Esau, or Edom, seems always to stand out in Scripture a type of the old nature. The wisdom of Teman is spoken of in Jeremiah xlix. 7 ; but the wisdom of this world is foolishness in the sight of God ; and the decree is gone forth, "I have sworn by myself, saith the LORD, that Bozrah shall become a desolation, a reproach, a waste, and a curse ; and all the cities thereof perpetual wastes" (Jer. xlix. 13). In Obadiah the total destruction of Edom is foretold ; and in Malachi they are called, "The border of wickedness." "*The people against whom the LORD hath indignation for ever*" (Mal. i. 4). It is from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah, that the Lion of Judah is represented as coming on the day of vengeance, the year of his redeemed (Isa. lxiii. 1-6).

sitteth in the seat of the scornful : but his delight is in the law of the LORD ; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season ; his leaf also shall not wither, and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper " (Ps. i. 1-3).

Thus Paul thanked God on behalf of the Colossians for the hope which was laid up for them in heaven, whereof they heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel, which was come to them as to all the world ; and *brought forth fruit*, as it did also in them, since the day they heard and knew the grace of God in truth (Col. i. 3-6).

The teeth seem to represent the faith whereby we receive and appropriate Christ, and, with Christ, *all* the promises of God.

"Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life ; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him. As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father, so he that eateth me even he shall live by me. This is that bread which came down from heaven ; not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead : he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever" (John vi. 53-58). "I am the bread of life. Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven ; if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever ; and the bread that

I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world" (John vi. 41, 49-51).

"Blessed is the man that trusteth in the LORD, and whose hope the LORD is: for he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit" (Jer. xvii. 7, 8).

"Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit" (John xv. 4, 5).

"Giving all diligence, add to your faith, virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. i. 5-8).

Ver. 3. *Thy lips are like a thread of scarlet,*

The door of the lips bears the mark of the blood. The Psalmist prayed, "Set a watch, O LORD, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips" (Ps. cxli. 3).

When the Paschal lamb was slain, the children of Israel were commanded to take of the blood, and strike it on the two side-posts, and on the upper door-post of the houses, wherein they eat it:—

"Ye shall take a bunch of hyssop, and dip it in the blood that is in the bason, and strike the lintel and the

two side-posts with the blood that is in the bason ; and none of you shall go out at the door of his house until the morning. For the LORD will pass through to smite the Egyptians ; and when he seeth the blood upon the lintel, and on the two side-posts, the LORD will pass over the door, and will not suffer the destroyer to come in unto your houses to destroy you" (Exod. xii. 7, 22, 23).

While "the teeth" feed on the flesh of the Lamb, the door of "the lips" is consecrated by its blood.

"If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness ; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Rom. x. 9, 10).

"The lips of the wise shall preserve them" (Prov. xiv. 3). They "disperse knowledge"¹ by making known to all those who pass by the efficacy of the blood. When the spies left Rahab's house, she asked for "*a true token*" that they might show kindness to her father's house, and deliver herself and her people from death. The true token was "*the line of scarlet thread which she bound in the window*" (Josh. ii. 12-21). By this her house was recognised as the abode of one *with whom covenant had been made*.

The scarlet thread also marks *the second birth*.²

When Isaiah saw the glory of God he was at once made sensible of the uncleanness of his lips and of the lips of the people : "Woe is me, for I am undone ;

¹ "The lips of the wise disperse knowledge" (Prov. xv. 7).

² In the birth of Tamar's children we read that one put out his hand, on which the midwife bound *a scarlet thread*. He drew back his hand, and his brother was born first. Afterward came out the child that had the scarlet thread upon his hand, and his name was called Zarah (*a rising of light*).

because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips : for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts " (Isa. vi. 5).

When Moses was commissioned to bear God's message to Pharaoh, he at once felt the inefficiency of his speech : " Behold, the children of Israel have not hearkened unto me ; how then shall Pharaoh hear me, who am of uncircumcised lips ? Behold, I am of uncircumcised lips, and how shall Pharaoh hearken unto me ? " (Exod. vi. 12, 30.)

If we would speak boldly for our God, our lips must bear the seal of the righteousness of our faith.¹ They must testify to the efficacy of the blood of sprinkling.² The lip like a thread of scarlet is the pure lip to which God will turn the people : " Then will I turn to the people a pure lip, that they may all call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him with one consent " (Zeph. iii. 9). It is the circumcised lip of those " who worship God in the Spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh " (Phil. iii. 3).

The King, in noticing the lips of his Bride as " like a thread of scarlet," adds,

And thy speech is comely ;

Because of the lips being redeemed by the blood, *and bearing its mark, therefore is her speech comely*, and her conversation in heaven, such as becometh the gospel of Christ. Her speech is alway with grace, seasoned with

¹ " And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had, yet being uncircumcised " (Rom. iv. 11).

² " Moreover he sprinkled likewise with blood both the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry. And almost all things are by the law purged with blood ; and without shedding of blood is no remission " (Heb. ix. 21, 22).

salt, savouring of the covenant of her God.¹ "She openeth her mouth with wisdom ; and in her tongue is the law of kindness " (Prov. xxxi. 26).

Thy temples are like a piece of a pomegranate within thy locks.

Upon the hem of the high priest's garment were wrought pomegranates. "Thou shalt make the robe of the ephod all blue. And there shall be an hole in the top of it, in the midst thereof : it shall have a binding of woven work round about the hole of it, as it were the hole of an habergeon, that it be not rent. And upon the hem (skirts) of it, thou shalt make pomegranates blue, and purple, and scarlet, round about the hem thereof ; and bells of gold between them round about ; a golden bell and a pomegranate, a golden bell and a pomegranate. And it shall be upon Aaron to minister ; and his sound shall be heard when he goeth in unto the holy place before the LORD, and when he cometh out, that he die not " (Exod. xxviii. 31-35).

With this robe our great High Priest covers His body (the Church). *The pomegranates on it are complete. Thus we "are complete in him,* which is the head of all principality and power" (Col. ii. 10).

The temples of the Bride resemble *a piece of a pomegranate* ; not the entire fruit. She bears the image of Christ, but it is *imperfectly*. She is crucified with

¹ "For our conversation is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Phil. iii. 20). "Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ" (Phil. i. 27). "Let your speech be alway with grace, *seasoned with salt*, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man" (Col. iv. 6). "And every oblation of thy meat-offering shalt thou season with salt ; *neither shalt thou suffer the salt of the covenant of thy God to be lacking from thy meat-offering* : with all thine offerings thou shalt offer salt" (Lev. ii. 13).

Christ, therefore she lives with Him, and manifests the fruit of the Spirit: "love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance" (Gal. v. 22, 23). "For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, and righteousness, and truth" (Eph. v. 9).

She has the first-fruits of the Spirit;¹ that holy Spirit of promise whereby she is sealed, and which is the earnest of her inheritance, until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of His glory (Eph. i. 13, 14).

Thus did John see the redeemed sealed in heaven;² and thus did Ezekiel see a mark set upon the foreheads of the men that sighed and cried for all the abominations done in the midst of Jerusalem.³

We are told that hereafter the servants of God, beholding the face of the Lamb, shall bear His name in their foreheads. They shall be like Him, for they

¹ "And not only they (the whole creation) but ourselves also, which have the first-fruits of the Spirit" (Rom. viii. 23).

² "And I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God: and he cried with a loud voice to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth, and the sea, saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads. And I heard the number of them which were sealed" (Rev. vii. 2-4).

³ "And the Lord said unto him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh, and that cry, for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof." And to the others (the six men who came from the way of the higher gate, which lieth towards the north, with slaughter weapons in their hands), "he said in mine hearing, Go ye after him through the city, and smite; let not your eye spare, neither have ye pity: slay utterly old and young, both maids, and little children, and women; *but come not near any man upon whom is the mark*; and begin at my sanctuary" (Ezek. ix. 2-6). A similar charge was given respecting those who were sealed in the Revelation. "And it was commanded them that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree; but only those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads" (Rev. ix. 4).

shall see Him as He is (1 John iii. 2) ; but now their temples are, as it were, bearing a token that they belong to Christ. Like the Church in the wilderness, they receive *a portion of the fruit of the land of promise, an earnest of the future possession, a foretaste of the glory which shall be revealed in them.*¹ This piece of pomegranate is manifested *within her locks*. Her iniquities are forgiven and her sins covered, before she can yield her members servants to righteousness, unto holiness. The fruit of the Spirit can only appear in those who are in Christ Jesus, whose life is "hid with Christ in God."² Being made free from sin, and become the servant of God, she has her fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.

It is those who *abide in Christ* that bring forth fruit to God. "The branch cannot bring forth fruit of itself except it abide in the vine." The works of those out of Christ are *dead works*, from which the conscience needs to be purged.³ The pomegranate is *living fruit*, the work of the Spirit ; for He has wrought all our works in us.⁴ "It is God which worketh in us to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Phil. ii. 13).

The piece of a pomegranate within the locks shows the fruit of her faith in the Saviour's atonement. *Because she has been redeemed, therefore she is dedi-*

¹ The spies who were sent to search the land brought back one cluster of grapes, which they bare between two on a staff ; and also of the pomegranates, and of the figs (Numb. xiii. 23).

² "Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness." "As ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness, and to iniquity unto iniquity ; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness" (Rom. vi. 18, 19).

³ "How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, *purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God ?*" (Heb. ix. 14.)

⁴ "LORD, thou wilt ordain peace for us: for thou also hast wrought all our works in us" (Isa. xxvi. 12).

cated; and all her powers are consecrated to the Redeemer's service. *It is beneath the shadow of the cross, Christ's shame and her glory, that the fruit of righteousness appears.* The closer she clings to that cross the more of this glorious fruit will be manifested.

Ver. 4. *Thy neck is like the tower of David, builded for an armoury, whereon there hang a thousand bucklers, all shields of mighty men.*

The neck holds up the head, uniting it to the body. It is the sign of an apostate Church that it *holds not the Head.*

The neck of the Bride is compared to the tower of David. We need scarcely inquire what is the tower of David. "The LORD is my rock, and *my fortress*, and my deliverer: the God of my rock; in him will I trust: he is my shield, and the horn of my salvation, *my high tower*, and my refuge"¹ (2 Sam. xxii. 2, 3). "Blessed be the LORD my strength, which teacheth my hands to war, and my fingers to fight. My goodness, and my fortress; *my high tower*, and my deliverer; my shield, and he in whom I trust; who subdueth my people under me" (Ps. cxliv. 1, 2). "Thou hast been a shelter for me, and *a strong tower* from the enemy" (Ps. lxi. 3). "*He is the tower of salvation for his king; and sheweth mercy to his anointed, unto David, and to his seed for evermore*" (2 Sam. xxii. 51). He is "the tower of the flock, the stronghold of the daughter of Zion."² "The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous runneth into it and is safe" (Prov. xviii. 10).

¹ David uses nearly similar language in Psalm xviii. 2, where he calls the LORD his "high tower."

² "And thou, O tower of the flock, the stronghold of the daughter of Zion, unto thee shall it come, even the first dominion" (Micah iv. 8).

This tower of David *is* builded *for an armoury*. "Every house is builded by some man,"¹ but he that built this tower is God : and He built it for this very purpose, *to be an armoury*. Within it is contained "the armour of light,"² to be worn by "the children of light ;" "the armour of righteousness" to compass God's people "on the right hand and on the left."³

Every portion of this armour is to be had in this tower, and the Christian is counselled to obtain and to wear it constantly :—

"Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. *Put on the whole armour of God*, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore *take unto you the whole armour of God*, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and, having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breast-plate of righteousness ; and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace ; above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take

¹ "For every house is builded by some man ; but he that built all things is God" (Heb. iii. 4).

² "Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light" (Rom. xiii. 12). "Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day" (1 Thess. v. 5).

³ "In all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings ; by pureness, by knowledge, by long-suffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned, by the word of truth, by the power of God, *by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left*" (2 Cor. vi. 4-7).

the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God : praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints" (Eph. vi. 10-18).

Within the armoury there hang a thousand bucklers, all shields of mighty men. The LORD is Himself the shield and buckler of His people.

Solomon says, "He is a buckler to them that walk uprightly" (Prov. ii. 7). David calls Him "his buckler" — "a buckler to all those that trust in him" (Ps. xviii. 30 ; 2 Sam. xxii. 31).

Jehovah announced Himself to Abraham (the father of all who believe), as a shield : "Fear not, Abram : I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward" (Gen. xv. 1). And David says, "Our soul waiteth for the LORD ; he is our help and our shield" (Ps. xxxiii. 20). "O Israel, trust thou in the LORD ; he is their help and their shield. O house of Aaron, trust in the LORD ; he is their help and their shield. Ye that fear the LORD, trust in the LORD ; he is their help and their shield" (Ps. cxv. 9-11).

When he prays the LORD to defend him against his enemies, his language is, "Slay them not, lest my people forget : scatter them by thy power ; and bring them down, O LORD, *our shield*" (Ps. lix. 11). "Thou, O LORD, art a shield for me ; my glory and the lifter up of mine head" (Ps. iii. 3).

The Lord is indeed "a shield unto them that put their trust in him" (Prov. xxx. 5).

In Ephesians faith is spoken of as the shield, because faith always lays hold of Christ, and opposes Him (in all His attributes) to the attacking enemy. The Lord

Jesus is a shield to *each* of His people, as well as to the Church collectively.

Within the tower of David is armour sufficient for all : and every Christian is commanded to put on the whole armour furnished from that armoury. "Happy art thou, O Israel : who is like unto thee, O people saved by the LORD, the shield of thy help, and who is the sword of thy excellency !" (Deut. xxxiii. 29.) "Who is he that condemneth ? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us" (Rom. viii. 34).

These are shields of *mighty men*. Their might is not their own. They are "strong in *the Lord*, and in the *power of his might*."

Thus Paul exclaimed, "Who is weak ? and I am not weak ? Who is offended, and I burn not ? If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities" (2 Cor. xi. 29, 30). "For, when I am weak, then am I strong" (2 Cor. xii. 10).

It is the nearness of the neck to the head, which makes it *resemble* Christ the tower of David, in whom we find all we need to defend us from our enemies, whether they be of the world, the *flesh*, or the devil.

"Walk about Zion, and go round about her : tell the towers thereof. Mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces, that ye may tell it to the generation following. For this God is our God for ever and ever ; he will be our guide even unto death" (Ps. xlviii. 12-14).

Ver. 5. *Thy two breasts are like two young roes that are twins, which feed among the lilies.*

In the preceding verses we have Faith in its different aspects. Faith taking the righteousness of Christ, and appropriating it to the Bride, making her therewith

very fair. Faith enabling *her* to see, who once was blind, and to have spiritual understanding in all things. Faith causing her to glory in the cross of Christ, and to accept with deep gratitude the covering He has provided for her. Faith making her to feed on the bread of life, and to receive spiritual life and strength from Him, as made known to her in the Word of God. Faith causing her to cast away all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, and to be cleansed, like the leper Naaman, in the fountain opened for sin and uncleanness. Faith enabling her to struggle against the old nature, and to keep it under subjection, thus bringing forth fruit to the praise and glory of God. Faith causing her mouth to proclaim the glad tidings of **salvation**, and to show forth all His praise. Faith making her cling to the **Cross**, and in submission to the Saviour and Lord devote to His service all the powers with which He has endowed her. Faith giving her foretaste of future joys. Faith uniting her to Christ, and enabling her to find in Him means to baffle all her spiritual foes, and to become strong in His strength.

Now we come to examine the love from which all the consolations of the gospel flow. By the breasts of her consolations are the children of God supplied with spiritual food, even the sincere milk of the Word. By them are they comforted. "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ" (2 Cor. i. 3-5).

The consolations of God, reconciled to His people by the great Mediator, are neither few nor small. "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee" (Isa. xlix. 15). "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably (to the heart) to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the LORD's hand double for all her sins" (Isa. xl. 1, 2).

God's Word in counsel and His oath are both pledged to afford strong consolation to those who have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before them.¹

The consolations of the gospel are calculated to satisfy *at all times*,² and those who have received these consolations are bound to communicate them to others. Thus the apostle declares, "Whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation . . . or whether we be comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation" (2 Cor. i. 6). The more we communicate to others, the greater will be our supply. "There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth. . . . The liberal soul (the soul of blessing) shall be made fat: and he that watereth shall be watered also himself" (Prov. xi. 24, 25).

The love of God shed abroad in the heart must find vent. How *natural*, as well as beautiful, is the scene recorded in the last chapter of John's Gospel: "Jesus

¹ "God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath; that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us" (Heb. vi. 17, 18).

² "Let her (the wife of thy youth) be as the loving hind and pleasant roe; let her breasts satisfy thee at all times, and be thou ravished always with her love" (Prov. v. 19).

saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs. He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep. He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep" (John xxi. 15-17).

Perhaps this scene, and the depth of love which it revealed as dwelling in the Saviour's heart to His redeemed ones, was present to Peter's mind when he penned his epistle, charging the elders to "feed the flock of God."

Freely this love has been bestowed on us, freely let it flow from us to others. Both wine and milk are offered in the gospel without money and without price. These breasts are compared to *two young roes*. It is those who realize their deliverance from the snare of the hunter¹ who are most anxious for the spiritual welfare of others.²

¹ "Deliver thyself as a roe from the hand of the hunter" (Prov. vi. 5).

² This was strikingly manifested in the case of Saul of Tarsus. It is a curious coincidence that this word "roe" should be the meaning of the name of a disciple well known in the Church for her great liberality: "There was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas (Doe, or Roe): this woman was full of good works and alms-deeds, which she did" (Acts ix. 36). The verse in Canticles closes that description of the graces of the Church; and hence it would appear that love, the

These roes are *twins*. As there is double security (God's Word in counsel and His oath), so there is double comfort ("Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people"). The repetition of comfort is not without deep significance.

In Genesis xli. 32 we read, "And for that the dream *was doubled* unto Pharaoh *twice*; *it is because the thing is established by God (prepared of God), and God will shortly bring it to pass.*"

"For your shame ye have double, and for confusion they shall rejoice in their portion: therefore in their land *they shall possess the double*; everlasting joy shall be unto them" (Isa. lxi. 7). "Turn you to the stronghold, ye prisoners of hope: even to-day do I declare that I will render *double* unto thee" (Zech. ix. 12).

It is *among the lilies* these roes feed. The love of God dwells amongst the people of God. The consolations of God's Word are for His children. Those most resemble their Master who have most of His Spirit; and that Spirit will show itself in love to the brethren, and in earnest endeavours to bring the glad tidings of salvation to the whole human race. The love of Christ is manifested not merely in love to those who are already Christ's, but to all who may be Christ's; in fact, to every member of the great human family. It is this love which proves our being Christ's.

Very specially should we love the people of God, for "every one that loveth him that begat, loveth him also that is begotten of him" (1 John v. 1). "We know that

consequence of true faith, is *the crowning grace of all*. So Paul would teach us in 1 Cor. xii. 31 and 1 Cor. xiii., when he says, "Covet earnestly the best gifts," and then proceeds to his unrivalled description of the love of Christ. If the Bible contained no other chapter than 1 Cor. xiii. we might well declare that it alone would prove its Divine origin.

we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." "God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him" (1 John iii. 14; iv. 16). "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one toward another" (John xiii. 35). James urges on us the practical exhibition of this love: "If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body, what doth it profit?" (James ii. 15, 16.) And Paul exhorts, "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all, especially unto them who are of the household of faith" (Gal. vi. 10). While Peter reminds us, that having purified our souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, we should love one another with a pure heart fervently (1 Pet. i. 22.)

God makes use of His people *here* to minister one to another; but Revelation opens before us a future when "the Lord God shall" Himself "wipe away tears from off all faces."¹

It is the bundle of myrrh lying all night betwixt the breasts of the Bride that causes this love which *never faileth* to be in her and abound. *Because* Christ dwells in our hearts by faith, *therefore* we are rooted and grounded in love.²

¹ "He will swallow up death in victory; and the LORD God will wipe away tears from off all faces" (Isa. xxv. 8). "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away" (Rev. xxi. 4).

² Thus Paul prays, "That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and

Ver. 6. *Until the day break, and the shadows flee away,
I will get me to the mountain of myrrh, and to the hill
of frankincense.*

This is her purpose. With the Christian it should be always pressing forward: "Forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before," we should "press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. iii. 13, 14).

The Bride has tasted the love of Christ, and she wants more. She has "a bundle," therefore she desires to get her to "the mountain." If a little of Christ be so precious, what must it be to be with Him, and to see Him "as He is"?

She says "*I will get me to the mountain.*" It was to "*the mountain*" Lot was urged to escape from the doomed city.¹ It was resting on "*the mountain*" Elijah pleaded and looked for the showers which were to descend on and fertilize the dry and thirsting land.²

depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God" (Eph. iii. 17-20). Instead of *comprehending* this love, we make wretched feeble attempts to grasp it. Surely to comprehend this love should be our earnest and ceaseless prayer.

¹ "And it came to pass, when they had brought them forth abroad, that he said, Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed" (Gen. xix. 17).

² "And Elijah went up to the top of Carmel; and he cast himself down upon the earth, and put his face between his knees, and said to his servant, Go up now, look toward the sea. And he went up, and looked, and said, There is nothing. And he said, Go again seven times. And it came to pass at the seventh time, that he said, Behold, there ariseth a little cloud out of the sea, like a man's hand. And he said, Go up, say unto Ahab, Prepare thy chariot, and get thee down that the rain stop thee not. And it came to pass in the meanwhile, that the heaven was black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain" (1 Kings xviii. 42-45).

It was on "*a high mountain apart*" that the three favoured disciples saw their Master so transfigured that Peter exclaimed, "It is good for us to be here;" and wished to make it his dwelling-place.¹

It is from the high mountain the glorious message of peace is to be proclaimed: "O thou that tellest good tidings to Zion, O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain; O thou that tellest good tidings to Jerusalem, O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God" (Isa. xl. 9). It is when the feet rest firmly on the mountain of myrrh (Christ), pressing forth its fragrance, and making felt by the world the purity, salvation, and devotion to Jesus of those who are His, and who get these blessings from Him, that the gospel is effectually preached.

It is when the soul rises above the things of the world, and holds communion with Christ, that the Spirit reveals the exceeding purity and beauty of that clothing of humility, which as "Man of Sorrows" He condescended to wear; and gives evidence that it is to Him all the prophets bare witness, and all the ordinances of the law pointed. It is resting on Christ we should entreat for and await the promised "showers of blessing;" remembering God's dealings, "Thou visitest the earth, and waterest it" (*Thou visitest the earth after*

¹ The account of the Transfiguration is given Matt. xvii. 1-8, Mark ix. 1-8, Luke ix. 28-36. The three accounts of the Transfiguration mention the white and glistering appearance of His raiment. There are times when the intense holiness of Jesus of Nazareth fills the soul with admiration. In heaven we doubt not the contemplation of the unearthly purity of the earthly nature He assumed will awaken amongst the redeemed the liveliest emotions of wonder, and give ever new zest to the song, "Holy, holy, holy."

thou hadst made it to desire). "Thou waterest the ridges thereof abundantly; thou settlest the furrows thereof (causest to descend into them); thou makest it soft (dissolvest it) with showers; thou blessest the springing thereof" (Ps. lxxv. 9, 10).

It is "when the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst," that the LORD has pledged His word to "hear them," that "the God of Israel will not forsake them" (Isa. xli. 17).

It is to the mountain of myrrh, Christ, the sinner is urged to flee from the wrath to come; and to this end God's messengers are sent to drag them from impending doom, as brands from the midst of the burning.

It was from mount Abarim and the hill Pisgah that Moses was permitted to see the promised land, that goodly land beyond Jordan, the "land which the LORD thy God careth for;" and upon which His eyes ever rested.¹

It is from the stand-point provided by God, from the mountain of myrrh, Christ, we may look beyond the present into the glorious future prepared for us, the inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, that fadeth not away. Till the day break, and the shadows of time

¹ "And the LORD said unto Moses, Get thee up into this mount Abarim (the regions beyond), and see the land which I have given unto the children of Israel" (Numb. xxvii. 12). "And Moses went up from the plains of Moab unto the mountain of Nebo, to the top of Pisgah (the hill), that is over against Jericho (the city of palm-trees), and the LORD shewed him all the land of Gilead, unto Dan" etc. (Deut. xxxiv. 1). It was Moses's earnest desire to see the land: "I pray thee let me go over, and see the good land that is beyond Jordan, that goodly mountain and Lebanon" (Deut. iii. 25). The description of Canaan is thus given; "A land which the LORD thy God careth for, the eyes of the LORD thy God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year" (Deut. xi. 12).

flee away, the Church of God will get her to the mountain of myrrh, and *to the hill of frankincense*, the hill of God's holiness, where iniquity not only cannot dwell, but where it cannot even be had in remembrance.

"Who shall ascend into the hill of the LORD? or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean ~~hands~~ hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully" (Ps. xxiv. 3, 4).

No man can have a right to ascend that holy hill, or to stand in that holy place: for "who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?" (Prov. xx. 9.) The Man Christ Jesus alone did no sin, He alone has a right to ascend the hill of the LORD: but *in Him* all His people are represented, and through Him and in Him their title to a footing there is secured. Thus it is God's light and God's truth, sent out by God (*first in the person of His Son, and afterwards by His Spirit*), which lead and at last bring the redeemed into this holy hill.¹

Thus is the prayer of the Psalmist answered, "O send out thy light and thy truth: let them lead me; let them bring me unto thy holy hill, and to thy tabernacles" (Ps. xliii. 3). Thus is the promise in Isaiah fulfilled, "I will bring the blind by a way that they

¹ Christ is the Light, "the true light which lighteneth every man which cometh into the world" (John i. 9). "I am come a light into the world" (John xii. 46).

Christ is the Truth: for He said of Himself, "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John xiv. 6).

When He ascended to the Father, He left the promise of the Spirit: "It is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart I will send him unto you." "When he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth; for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak; and he will shew you things to come" (John xvi. 7-13).

knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them " (Isa. xlii. 16).

Ver. 7. *Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee.*

Here is her title to get her to the holy hill of God. He in whose eyes the very heavens are not clean, pronounces her *all fair*. "You who were sometime alienated, and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprieveable in his sight" (Col. i. 21, 22). Whatever her past life may have been, however imperfect her present service, she is "accepted in the Beloved," and in Him is seen "without spot and blameless." Within, she is "all glorious;" without, "her clothing is of wrought gold."¹ Beheld in Christ, she is "the perfection of beauty!"² It is because He offered Himself without spot to God, as the Lamb of the Great Sacrifice, that He is able to present her to Himself, "a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing."

It is when she exclaims, "I will get me to the mountain of myrrh, and to the hill of frankincense," that He pronounces her *all fair*, and says there is no spot in her. The perfection of each member, each forgiven one, strikes Him now, as the beauty of the Church collectively did in Canticles i. 15.

If we had more of Christ's spirit, we would see more

¹ "The King's daughter is *all glorious within; her clothing is of wrought gold*" (Ps. xlv. 13).

² "Out of Zion, *the perfection of beauty*, God hath shined" (Ps. l. 2).

of Christ in each member of His mystical body. It would be on *that* our eye would rest, instead of on the blemishes and spots of the earthly nature. How unlike Christ to be ever on the watch for a brother's fall! How like Christ to seek the reflection of His image, and to love and rejoice in it!

The Father sees as the Son sees. Thank God He "is the judge;"¹ and even to the weakest believer (because united to Christ by a living faith) He says, "Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee."

Ver: 8. *Come with me from Lebanon, my spouse, with me from Lebanon: look from the top of Amana, from the top of Shenir and Hermon, from the lions' dens, from the mountains of the leopards.*

If she come, it must be *with Him*. She cannot take one step of this journey of faith alone. This is the first place in this beautiful poem where He calls her "spouse." It is, *as united to Christ, she comes with Christ "from Lebanon."* In Cant. v. 15 the countenance of the King is compared to Lebanon. It seems as if the Lord invited her to draw courage from the contemplation of Him, to come with Him; and looking above earth, and earth's troubles, to continue her heavenly course. We do not find Amana elsewhere mentioned in Scripture; but of Hermon we read that the Sidonians called it Sirion, and the Amorites Shenir.² It was *on this side Jordan*, and had belonged to the enemies of Israel, and been defiled by their iniquities. *Then* it was called *Shenir*. Now it belongs to Israel; is a conquered

¹ "But God is the judge; he putteth down one and setteth up another" (Ps. lxxv. 7).

² Deut. iii. 9. "On this side Jordan, in the valley over against Beth-peor, in the land of Sihon, king of the Amorites. . . . mount Sion, which is Hermon" (Deut. iv. 46, 47, 48).

territory ; bears *a new name*, Hermon ; and on it descends the heavenly dew, the dew of Hermon, which fell upon the mountains of Zion.¹

This is the position of the Church in the world. She is bought with blood, and conquered. Once she belonged to and was occupied by the enemy of God. Now she is consecrated to the Lord, His possession and inheritance ; and He gives to her a new name, which none know save they who receive it.² Not only does she receive a new name, but also a new nature, for if any be "in Christ, he is a new creature : old things are passed away ; behold, all things are become new" (2 Cor. v. 17). On her the LORD commands the blessing, even *life for evermore*.

It is remarkable that both the old name (Shenir) and the new name (Hermon) are given here. In this world it is never to be forgotten what the Church once was—"dead in trespasses and sins ;" all its members, "enemies in their mind by wicked works." In Revelation vii. 14 we are told that the robes of the redeemed were washed, which makes us remember they once were defiled.³ It is not till the twenty-first of Revelation that the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, and the former troubles are forgotten, and hid from even the

¹ "As the dew of Hermon, that descended upon the mountains of Zion : for there the LORD commanded the blessing, life for evermore" (Ps. cxxxiii. 3).

² "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it" (Rev. ii. 17). "And the Gentiles shall see thy righteousness, and all kings thy glory : and thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the LORD shall name" (Isa. lxii. 2).

³ "These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (Rev. vii. 14).

of Christ in each member of His mystical body. It would be on *that* our eye would rest, instead of on the blemishes and spots of the earthly nature. How unlike Christ to be ever on the watch for a brother's fall! How like Christ to seek the reflection of His image, and to love and rejoice in it!

The Father sees as the Son sees. Thank God He "is the judge;"¹ and even to the weakest believer (because united to Christ by a living faith) He says, "Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee."

Ver. 8. *Come with me from Lebanon, my spouse, with me from Lebanon: look from the top of Amana, from the top of Shenir and Hermon, from the lions' dens, from the mountains of the leopards.*

If she come, it must be *with Him*. She cannot take one step of this journey of faith alone. This is the first place in this beautiful poem where He calls her "*spouse*." It is, *as united to Christ, she comes with Christ "from Lebanon."* In Cant. v. 15 the countenance of the King is compared to Lebanon. It seems as if the Lord invited her to draw courage from the contemplation of Him, to come with Him; and looking at earth, and earth's troubles, to continue her heavenly course. We do not find *Amana* elsewhere mentioned in Scripture; but of *Hermon* we read that the Amorites called it *Sirion*, and the Amorites *Shenir*:² *this side Jordan*, and had belonged to Israel, and been defiled by their iniquity. Now it belongs to Israel.

¹ "But God is the judge; he putteth down the one and exalteth another" (Ps. lxxv. 7).

² Deut. iii. 9. "On this side Jordan, in the land of Sihon, king of the Amorites, Beth-peor, in the land of Sihon, king of the Amorites, mount Zion, which is Hermon" (Deut. iii. 9).



the least of the mountains
 the mountains shall
 be brought down
 the longest of the
 New Lord,
 and the leopard
 which does the
 does the little child
 for I see it not
 things in subjection
 he hath put all
 things

my sister spouse ;
 one of thine eyes,
 when He ad-
 "leopards" (Hab. i. 8). The
 bitter and hasty nation."
 will he unto them as a lion ; as
 them" (Hos. xiii. 7). The
 Ethiopian change his skin, or the
 can do good, that are accustomed
 him, speaking of the transgressions
 a lion out of the forest shall slay
 shall spoil them, a leopard shall watch
 that goeth out thence shall be torn in
 from which this verse is taken, was
 great adversary ; and there can be no
 promises contained in it can only be
 by and by virtue of its union with Christ.
 all things in subjection under his feet. For
 all in subjection under him, he left nothing not
 But now we see not yet all things put under him"

He calls her sister; for whosoever shall do the will of His Father which is in heaven, the same is His brother, and sister, and mother (~~Matt.~~ xii. 50). She is His sister, being the child of God by adoption, and she is entitled to call Him brother.

Not only is He a friend who loveth at all times, but a brother *born* for adversity (Prov. xvii. 17). It was because of ~~her~~ adversity, and *in order to be a brother entitled to save her*, that He came into the world.¹ She is His sister, conformed to His image, transformed by the renewing of her mind. "Whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first-born among many brethren" (Rom. viii. 29).

She is not only His sister, but *His spouse*. She is subject unto Him in everything, nourished and cherished by Him.² Each of her members is a member of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones. From the crucified second Adam has God raised up the woman, the Church, to reflect His image, and dwell with Him for

¹ "God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, . . . to redeem them that were under the law, that ye might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ" (Gal. iv. 4-7). "He is not ashamed to call them brethren; saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren" (Heb. ii. 11, 12).

² This great mystery concerning Christ and His Church is recorded by the Spirit in Eph. v. "For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church; and he is the Saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing." "No man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: for we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh" (Eph. v. 23-32).

ever in glory.¹ Some of the most tender appeals to the people of God are founded on this relationship. "Turn, O backsliding children, saith the LORD; for I am married unto you; and I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion" (Jer. iii. 14). "Fear not; . . . for thy Maker is thine husband; the LORD of hosts is his name; and thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel" (Isa. liv. 4, 5).

The peculiar name "*sister spouse*," with its double relationship, seems to have been foreshadowed by the case of Abraham and Sarah: "And yet indeed she is my sister; she is the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife" (Gen. xx. 12). It is as the child of God by adoption, she has become the Bride of Christ. His Father is her Father; but He was never the child of wrath as she once was, therefore He never needed to be born again as she did. He raises her to the Divine relationship, and gives her a Father in heaven. As to His earthly relationships they (being for time) cannot enter into question here. "Henceforth know we no man after the flesh; yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more. Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature" (2 Cor. v. 16, 17).

¹ "And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; and the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of man" (Gen. ii. 21-23). Thus Christ died in order that the woman, the Church, might live. "He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again" (2 Cor. v. 15).

This sister spouse has ravished (taken away) His heart. His affections are engrossed by His Church. It is her *singleness of eye* which *captivates* His heart.¹ She has turned from looking at any earthly object, and, fixing her gaze on Him alone, has become like Him,² His sister as well as His spouse. When we look only toward Jesus, when we desire with simplicity of heart His glory, *then* His love is manifested with increasing fulness to our soul. It is "the divided heart," the double mind, the looking two ways,³ which prevents us realizing the depth of the love of Christ.

When the language of Israel is, "Asshur shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses; neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, Ye are our gods:" then God's promise is, "I will be as the dew unto Israel; he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon. His branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive-tree, and his smell as Lebanon" (Hos. xiv. 3, 5, 6).

It is the eye of faith directed ever toward the LORD;⁴

¹ "The light of the body is the eye: therefore *when thine eye is single, thy whole body also is full of light*; but when thine eye is evil, thy body also is full of darkness" (Luke xi. 34). There is a similar passage in Matt. vi. 22, 23.

² "We know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (1 John iii. 2).

³ Of Israel it was said, "*Their heart is divided*; now shall they be found faulty" (Hos. x. 2). "A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways" (James i. 8). "Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee" (Prov. iv. 25).

It is the undivided heart which leads the soul trusting in Christ to look away from the difficulties and dangers which surround her here, and to follow Christ without faltering.

⁴ "Mine eyes are ever toward the LORD; for he shall pluck my feet out of the net" (Ps. xxv. 15). *It was not at the net David looked, but towards the Lord.* "I waited patiently for the LORD; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry" (Ps. xl. 1). Passages abound in the Psalms, showing that David, when in trouble, looked away

not only lifted up to Him, and looking beyond and through everything to Him, but waiting on Him continually, which ravishes the heart of Christ. "For since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside thee, what he hath prepared for him that waiteth for him" (Isa. lxiv. 4). "Thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes, *with one chain of thy neck.*" The chain is the law of her father, the instruction of her mother; that chain with which the King has adorned her neck, and made her very comely. In Cant. i. 10 it is called "chains;" here it is called *one chain*. All the commandments of our Father are comprehended in this saying—"LOVE." "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me" (John xiv. 21). "Love is the fulfilling of the law" (Rom. xiii. 10). Faith worketh by love, because God is love: and faith takes God to work in the believing soul, "to will and to do of his good pleasure."

The order of the passage is accurate. The heart of Christ is ravished with one of her eyes; the single, constant, uplifted eye of faith: with one chain of her neck; the love which most surely follows. *This love is the reflection of His image*: an imperfect one here, but hereafter to be perfect and unsullied. No wonder that Christ rejoices to see the lost likeness of God restored, however faintly, however incompletely: to see the evil work of the first Adam undone, and the travail of soul of the second Adam in the act of accomplishment!¹

from the trouble to Jehovah; and neither counted on his own powers, nor on the powers or efforts of any creature.

¹ "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him" (Gen. i. 27).

The birth of the eldest son Cain, the first human being born

In this passage faith is named first; because without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb. xi. 6), and love is named afterwards, because it is the consequence of faith. "He that loveth not knoweth not God" (1 John iv. 8). "Every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God" (1 John iv. 7). "He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him" (1 John iv. 16). Here is the likeness of the sister, the union of the spouse:

Ver. 10. How fair is thy love, my sister spouse! how much better is thy love than wine! and the smell of thine ointments than all spices!

Christ says of her love, "How fair!" We show how we value a thing by the price we give for it. *It was His own blood He gave for her love.* He esteemed it worth the sacrifice, "For the joy that was set before him, he endured the cross, despising the shame" (Heb. xii. 2). When it lay between His blood and her love He freely gave the former. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John xv. 13); "but God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners (enemies), Christ died for us" (Rom. v. 8). "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us" (1 John iii. 16).

He esteems her love better than wine, and the smell of her ointment better than all spices! *The smell reveals the ointment.* It is a constant memorial, *even to the blind.* The unction from the Holy One is the unity of the Spirit; the sweet fragrance of which reveals into the world, proves how completely the image of God, who is love, was destroyed. Instead of love was hate. Instead of a life-giver was a murderer.

to the world that the anointed ones are set apart to God's service. It is called in Revelation, eye-salve ; and is (like all else that is good and perfect) the gift of God in Christ.¹ Each vessel of the sanctuary, great and small, must receive of this anointing.²

Spices were greatly esteemed in Eastern courts. Amongst the costly offerings brought by the Queen of Sheba to Solomon, spices are mentioned in the list, with gold and precious stones.

The ointments are formed by the union and blending together of all the spices. There is a crushing, and breaking up, and blending, each in its exact proportion, of *all* the spices ; in order to make the precious ointment that Jesus loves. *The smell of the spices in the ointment exceeds the smell of the spices before they were thus crushed and beaten together.* We read in Cant. v. 13 where the spices grew, "His cheeks are as a bed of spices." When the Ruler of Israel had been smitten on the cheek,³ crushed, trampled on, put to death, then the right to bestow the precious ointment was pur-

¹ "But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and know all things" (1 John ii. 20). "The anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you ; and ye need not that any man teach you ; but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him" (1 John ii. 27). "Anoint thine eyes with eye-salve, that thou mayest see" (Rev. iii. 18).

² "And thou shalt make it an oil of holy ointment, an ointment compound after the art of the apothecary : it shall be an holy anointing oil. And thou shalt anoint the tabernacle of the congregation therewith, and the ark of the testimony, and the table and *all his vessels*, and the candlestick and *his vessels*, and the altar of incense, and the altar of burnt-offering with *all his vessels*, and the laver and his feet. And thou shalt sanctify them, that they may be most holy" (Exod. xxx. 25-29).

³ "They shall smite the judge of Israel with a rod upon the cheek" (Mic. v. 1).

chased. When He ascended on high He received gifts for men, yea, for the rebellious also, that the LORD God might dwell among them (Ps. lxxviii. 18). The descent of the Spirit at Pentecost was the first great outpouring of the precious ointment, which fell from the head of the High Priest down even to the lowest skirt of His garment.¹ The mutual love produced by this outpouring is noticed by the Divine historian: "And all that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all, as every man had need, and they, continuing daily with *one accord* in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and *singleness of heart*, praising God, and having favour with all the people" (Acts ii. 44-47). Similar consequences followed the second descent of the Spirit. "They spake the word of God with boldness." "And the multitude of them that believed were *of one heart* and *of one soul*: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed were his own; but they had all things common. And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus; *and great grace was upon them all*" (Acts iv. 32, 33).

In this beautiful 10th verse of the fourth of Canticles, Christ reminds the Church of the price He paid for her ransom, and what her love cost Him, thus exciting that love. We need continually to be reminded, and that

¹ "It (unity) is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, Aaron's beard; that went down to the skirts of his garments." Where this unity exists the LORD commands the blessing. The blessing that followed at Pentecost was manifest. If such unity existed now, how few poor would be amongst us!

by Christ Himself, of the wonderful sacrifice at Calvary. It is by looking at that our love is quickened. When He says, "How much better is thy love than wine!" *then* he adds, "and the smell of thine ointments than all spices!" Thus the beloved disciple in his First Epistle speaks of the love manifested by the blood shed, before he speaks of the love wrought in us by sight of that blood. "Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another" (1 John iv. 11).

Ver. 11. *Thy lips, O spouse, drop the honeycomb :*

The circumcised, blood-besprinkled lip of verse 3, which bears the mark of redemption, drops the honeycomb,—pleasant words, sweet to the soul, and health to the bones, and which bring the knowledge of wisdom to those who receive them.¹ Thus Solomon exhorts his son : "My son, eat thou honey, because it is good ; and the honeycomb, which is sweet to thy taste ; *so shall the knowledge of wisdom be to thy soul* ; when thou hast found it, then there shall be a reward, and thy expectation shall not be cut off" (Prov. xxiv. 13, 14). God's people should ever seek the "edifying of the church ;"² remembering who has said, "That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment ; for by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned" (Matt. xii.

¹ "The heart of the wise teacheth (maketh wise) his mouth, and addeth learning to his lips." "Pleasant words are as an honeycomb, sweet to the soul, and health to the bones" (Prov. xvi. 23, 24).

² Clearly and beautifully is this shown in 1 Cor. xiv., where Christians are urged to seek those gifts which will most edify the Church, and to use those they have for this purpose.

36, 37). "Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another" (Rom. xiv. 19). Let us shun profane vain babblings; for they will increase unto more ungodliness (2 Tim. ii. 16). And avoid foolish and unlearned questions, which gender strifes; and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law, which are unprofitable and vain (2 Tim. ii. 23, and Titus iii. 9). "The lips of the righteous" should "feed many" (Prov. x. 21); but how often are we reminded, even in the society of Christians, that "the talk of the lips tendeth only to penury" (Prov. xiv. 23).

How needful that we should apply to Him who creates the fruit of the lips, that our conversation may be so directed as to glorify Him; that we may speak of excellent things; and that the opening of our lips may be right things; that all the words of our mouth may be in righteousness, and nothing froward or perverse in them.¹ Thus the Psalmist prayed the LORD to set a watch before his mouth, and to keep the door of his lips: and thus the apostle entreats us to offer "the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to his name" (Heb. xiii. 15).

Honey and milk are under thy tongue :

"The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple: the statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlight-

¹ It is thus Wisdom appeals to men: "Hear, for I will speak of excellent things; and the opening of my lips shall be right things. For my mouth shall speak truth; and wickedness is an abomination to my lips. All the words of my mouth are in righteousness; there is nothing froward or perverse in them" (Prov. viii. 6-8).

ening the eyes : the fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever : the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired than gold, yea, than much fine gold ; sweeter also than honey, and the dropping of honey-combs" (Ps. xix. 7-10).

The Word of the LORD is as honey for sweetness, as milk for nourishment.¹ And because it dwelleth in her richly in all wisdom, "she openeth her mouth with wisdom ; and in her tongue is the law of kindness" (Prov. xxxi. 26). Before her union with Christ it was not so. Paul, quoting from the Psalms, describes the use she formerly made of the powers God had given her : "Their throat is an open sepulchre ; with their tongues they have used deceit ; the poison of asps is under their lips : whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness" (Rom. iii. 13, 14). And James tells us that the tongue, unconsecrated to God's service, "is a fire, a world of iniquity ; so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature ; and it is set on fire of hell." "The tongue can *no man tame* ; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison" (James iii. 6, 8). How this unruly member has been tamed by God ; and how (instead of deadly poison) it is made to convey sweet and nourishing food to the soul, this verse in Canticles plainly shows. But we must ever remember that it is by virtue of her union with Christ (as His spouse), that this miracle is effected ; and that the tongue which used to mutter perverseness, and was bent as a bow to speak lies, now proclaims the righteousness of the LORD, and is valiant for the truth upon earth. "O LORD, open thou my lips ; and my

¹ "As new-born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, *that ye may grow thereby*" (1 Pet. ii. 2).

mouth shall shew forth thy praise" (Ps. li. 15). It is only those who feel the value of the Word, as having enlightened their own eyes, and nourished their own souls, who are anxious to communicate these blessings to others. It is only the spouse of Christ whose lips drop the honey-comb; and under whose tongue are honey and milk.¹

And the smell of thy garments is like the smell of Lebanon.

The smell of the Bride's garments is mentioned in Psalm xlv. 8: "All thy garments smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia, out of the ivory palaces, whereby they have made thee glad." In Exodus xxix. 29 we read, "The holy garments of Aaron shall be his son's after him, to be anointed therein, and to be consecrated in them." These garments were sprinkled with the blood that was upon the altar, and anointed with the holy oil. In order that we may become a holy priesthood to the Lord, our great High Priest puts upon us (His followers) the garments of salvation, the robe of righteousness. These garments, consecrated by the blood of Christ, and anointed by the Holy Spirit, become a garment of praise.² The unity of the Spirit makes the garment *one*. The smell of these garments is like the smell of Lebanon. In the fifth of Canticles

¹ Canaan was described as a land flowing with milk and honey. We are told that when Jonathan, not knowing his father's prohibition, tasted of the honey which dropped on the ground, *his eyes were enlightened*. "See, I pray you, how mine eyes have been enlightened, because I tasted a little of this honey" (1 Sam. xiv. 25-30).

² "And thou shalt take of the blood that is upon the altar, and of the anointing oil, and sprinkle upon Aaron, and upon his garments, and upon his sons, and upon the garments of his sons with him; and he shall be hallowed, and his garments, and his sons, and *his sons' garments with him*" (Exod. xxix. 21).

and 15th verse, the countenance of the King is compared to Lebanon ; and in Hosea xiv. 6 the smell of Lebanon is noticed as a consequence of the descent of the dew. It is because the light of the King's countenance rests upon her, and because the dew of the Spirit descends upon her, that a sweet perfume of praise ascends from the garments of the Bride. It is but the acknowledgment of what He has done for her, in clothing her with salvation : but, as in our Saviour's time, so now, how few are found amongst the cleansed to give glory to God !¹

And yet it is to show forth the praises of Him who hath called us out of darkness into His marvellous light, that God's people are made a royal priesthood ; and God has Himself assured us, that whoso offereth praise glorifieth Him.² The proclamation of liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those that are bound, should awaken our liveliest gratitude.³ The cedars of Lebanon, trees of righteousness, the planting

¹ Amongst the ten lepers cleansed, there was but one, "when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face at his feet, giving him thanks" (Luke xvii. 12-19).

² "Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar (purchased) people ; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light" (1 Pet. ii. 9). "Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me" (Ps. l. 23).

³ "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me ; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek ; he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound ; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God ; to comfort all that mourn ; to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness ; that they might be called Trees of righteousness, The planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified" (Isa. lxi. 1-3).

of the LORD, should glorify Jehovah. If all creation is called upon to praise His holy name, how much more should His people rejoice in the LORD, and their soul be joyful in their God ; for He hath clothed them with the garments of salvation, He hath covered them with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels (Isa. lxi. 10).

As the Church passes through the world (in it, but not of it), the smell of her garments should reveal to whom she belongs. There should be around her an atmosphere fragrant with the perfume of her gratitude to God, and testifying that her life is devoted to Him, a sacrifice holy, acceptable unto God, which is indeed but a reasonable service.¹

Ver. 12. *A garden enclosed (barred) is my sister spouse ; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed.*

The Lord compares His Church to a garden, a place *reclaimed*, in order to produce fruit and flowers for the Master. Each era in the history of the Church has had its garden. A garden, in order properly to represent the Church, must have Christ in its midst. Thus in the midst of the garden of Eden was there *the tree of life*.² In the midst of the vineyard of the house of Israel was *a tower*. In the New Testament we read of two gardens ; in one of which Jesus was betrayed. In

¹ "I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service" (Rom. xii. 1).

² "*The tree of life also in the midst of the garden*" (Gen. ii. 9). The vineyard of the house of Israel is fully described in the fifth of Isaiah. In the 21 verse it says, "*He built a tower in the midst of it.*" David continually speaks of Christ as his tower, and the tower of His people.

the other (it was the place where Christ was crucified), was a new sepulchre wherein was never man yet laid. There His people laid the dead body of Jesus ; and there, when the proper time arrived, the risen Lord appeared.¹ The Church of God receives and welcomes a crucified Saviour. He holds in her bosom a place never occupied before. To the world He is as one dead, but she knows that though for a little while she does not see Him, yet His word is pledged that she shall see Him, and her heart shall rejoice, and, her joy shall no man take from her. "Unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time, without sin, unto salvation" (Heb. ix. 28).

In Revelation we have also a garden : a city and a garden combined. No sepulchre is there ; "for there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain ; for the former things are passed away." "And there shall be no more curse : but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it ; and his servants shall serve him," *no longer ministering to the dead body, but to the risen and glorified Lord.*

The Jewish Church was represented as a vineyard, wherein the vine brought out of Egypt was planted.²

¹ In John xviii. we have the account of Christ's betrayal in the garden. John is the only one of the Evangelists who calls it "a garden." The others speak of it as a place named Gethsemane. None of the Gospels, except John's, mention that Joseph's sepulchre was in a garden. "Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden ; and in the garden a new sepulchre, wherein was never man yet laid. There laid they Jesus" (John xix. 41, 42). John also tells that Mary Magdalene supposed at first that Jesus was the gardener.

² "Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt ; thou hast cast out the heathen, and planted it. *Thou preparedst before it, and didst cause it to take deep root, and it filled the land*" (Ps. lxxx. 8, 9).

The Christian Church is sometimes represented as a vineyard, where the true Vine with its many branches grows. But in this verse the whole Church is looked upon as a garden, wherein are found plants of every kind. Here are people of every nation under heaven, and yet "there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free : but Christ is all, and in all" (Col. iii. 11). This garden is the husbandry of God, and in it He gives employment to His servants. Paul plants, Apollos waters, but God gives the increase. "So then neither is he that planteth anything, neither he that watereth ; but God that giveth the increase." "Now, he that planteth and he that watereth are one" (having one purpose, viz., the growth and improvement of the plants committed to their care) ; "and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour. For we are labourers together with God" (1 Cor. iii. 6-9).

This garden is *enclosed*. The first garden *man* was put in to keep ; he failed, and was driven out. There seems to have been no enclosure there. The Jewish vineyard *was fenced*.¹ Circumcision, and the various ordinances of God, formed an enclosure which separated them from the nations which knew not God. The partition-wall between Jew and Gentile was broken down by Christ, that the Gentiles might be brought in.

The Christian garden is kept by the power of God through faith, in answer to the Saviour's prayer : "Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou

¹ "My well-beloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill : and he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a wine-press therein" (Isa. v. 1-7).

hast given me, that they may be one, as we are. While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name" (John xvii. 11, 12).

The arrangement of the verse in Canticles is very beautiful: "*A garden enclosed is my sister spouse.*" His having been made flesh, and become our Elder Brother, has caused the formation of this garden. His having united us to Himself by a living faith has caused its enclosure. "Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; that *at that time ye were without Christ*, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: but now, *in Christ Jesus*, ye who sometime were far off, are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, *who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition*; having abolished in his flesh the enmity, the law of commandments in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man" (Eph. ii. 11-15).

This reclaimed, enclosed land is "like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not" (Isa. lviii. 11). Within her is a hidden spring, which has converted her dry ground into a wilderness, her thirsty land into springs of water.¹ Christ within her is the spring whence the living water is supplied.²

¹ He turneth the wilderness into a standing water, and dry ground into water springs. And there he maketh the hungry to dwell, that they may prepare a city for habitation" (Ps. cvii. 35, 36).

² "The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water, springing up into everlasting life" (John iv. 14). "He that

All her springs are in Him.¹ Her soul is fertilized by this spring, invisible to the outer world. The Church of Christ is not only a spring shut up, but also she is a *fountain sealed*. With Christ is the fountain of life,² and she is one with Him. From His Spirit she has received the law of the wise, and been taught the fear of the LORD. These have been to her a fountain of life, and by means of them has she been extricated from the snares of death.³ The life and fertility of the garden manifest to the world the existence of the spring shut up, the fountain sealed. Christ has sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts (2 Cor. i. 22). After we believe, we are sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance, until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory (Eph. i. 13, 14). This seal marks us as belonging to God. "The Lord knoweth them that are his" (2 Tim. ii. 19).

Ver. 13. *Thy plants are an orchard of pomegranates, with pleasant fruits; camphire with spikenard;*

To these plants a gracious promise is vouchsafed : "Those that be planted in the house of the LORD shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing" (Ps. xcii. 13, 14).

believeth on me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive" (John vii. 38, 39).

¹ "All my springs are in thee" (Ps. lxxxvii. 7).

² "For with thee is the fountain of life: and in thy light shall we see light" (Ps. xxxvi. 9).

³ "The law of the wise is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death" (Prov. xiii. 14). "The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death" (Prov. xiv. 27).

The pomegranates were the fruit wrought into the High Priest's garment,¹ on which the holy anointing oil descended.² They are fruits of Canaan; "fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God" (Phil. i. 11); and are called in the epistle to the Hebrews, "the peaceable fruit."³

The tree is known by its fruit, and the fruit of the pomegranate is *pleasant*. "For this cause we also, since the day we heard, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that ye might walk worthy of the Lord *unto all pleasing*, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God" (Col. i. 9, 10).

Beside the pomegranates with their pleasant fruits, this garden contains camphire with spikenard. With the camphire (Christ), God will freely give us all things.⁴ From the 12th verse of the 1st chapter of Canticles it appears that spikenard represents the love which flows from a free sense of pardon, and which makes the chief of sinners bold to approach the sinner's friend, and pour forth her offering of gratitude.⁵

¹ "And upon the hem of it, thou shalt make pomegranates, blue, purple, and scarlet, round about the hem thereof; and bells of gold between them round about: a golden bell and a pomegranate, a golden bell and a pomegranate upon the hem of the robe round about. And it shall be upon Aaron to minister" (Exod. xxviii. 33-35).

² The precious ointment upon the head ran down upon the beard, Aaron's beard, and went down to the skirts of his garments" (Ps. cxxxiii. 2).

³ Pomegranates were amongst the fruits brought by the spies from Canaan. Paul says the chastening of God's children "yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness" (Heb. xii. 11).

⁴ The Church says of Christ, "My beloved is unto me a cluster of *camphire* in the vineyards of En-gedi" (Cant. i. 14).

⁵ "While the King sitteth at his table, my spikenard sendeth forth the smell thereof" (Cant. i. 12).

Ver. 14. *Spikenard and saffron ; calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense ; myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices :*

We do not read of saffron elsewhere in Scripture ; but calamus is mentioned by both Isaiah and Jeremiah. Israel was reproached with having neglected to buy it for God : "Thou hast bought me no sweet cane with money" (Isa. xliii. 24) ; and at a later period when she did offer it, it was unacceptable because of her iniquity : "To what purpose cometh there to me incense from Sheba, and the sweet cane from a far country ? Your burnt-offerings are not acceptable, nor your sacrifices sweet unto me" (Jer. vi. 20).

From these verses we may gather that it signified some affection of the heart, without which the outward offering was distasteful to God ; and that this affection is something not natural to man, but the work of the Spirit, seems implied by the sweet cane coming from a *far country*.

Sweet cinnamon and sweet calamus together, in equal proportions, were used with pure myrrh, cassia, and oil-olive in the holy anointing oil. *All these were needed for the sanctification of God's vessels.*

Cinnamon and calamus seem to be graces essential to the Christian character, for they are named "*with all trees of frankincense.*"

The trees of frankincense are "trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD." We must remember that where frankincense and oil were used *iniquity was not brought to remembrance*.¹ The trees of frankincense are

¹ In the meat-offerings (Lev. ii.), frankincense and oil were used. In the offering of jealousy neither oil nor frankincense was allowed to be used, *because iniquity was brought to remembrance.*

therefore sinners forgiven, those of whom David said, "Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin" (Ps. xxxii. 1, 2; Rom. iv. 7, 8). They are the worshippers who, once purged, have no more conscience of sins; and with whom the Lord has made a covenant, saying, "Their sins and iniquities will I remember no more."¹

In myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices (even those of the holy perfume), are comprehended all things needful for the preservation of Christ's body, the Church.² The garden is made by God, enclosed by God, set apart by God, planted by God—and all the graces found in it are the free gifts of His love.

Ver. 15. *A fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon.*

This fountain of gardens is called by Moses "the fountain of Jacob." When Israel travelled through the wilderness God turned the rock into a standing water, the flint into a fountain of waters (Ps. cxiv. 8). "That Rock was Christ" (1 Cor. x. 4). This fountain turns the desert into a garden. It is "the fountain of life,"

¹ Speaking of the Jewish sacrifices the apostle says, "they could never make the comers thereunto perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins." He then contrasts the one offering once made of Christ, and explains the new covenant based upon this sacrifice: "I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more" (Heb. x. 1-18).

² "There came also Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night, and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound. Then took they the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury" (John xix. 39, 40).

"the fountain of living waters;"¹ and the gardens it refreshes are the dwelling-places of God's people. "How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, thy tabernacles, O Israel!"

"As the valleys are they spread forth, *as gardens by the river's side*, as the trees of lign-aloes which the LORD hath planted, as cedar-trees beside the waters" (Numb. xxiv. 5, 6).

This well of living waters was prefigured in the Old Testament by two remarkable wells. One, which caused Joseph's bough to become fruitful: "Joseph is a fruitful bough, *a fruitful bough by a well*, whose branches run over the wall" (Gen. xlix. 22). Another, "whereof the LORD spake unto Moses, Gather the people together, and I will give them water. Then Israel sang this song, Spring up, O well; sing ye unto it: The princes digged the well, the nobles of the people digged it, by the direction of the lawgiver, with their staves" (Numb. xxi. 16-18). It is thus, by the direction of our lawgiver, Christ, the princes of God, the earnest, wrestling men of prayer, resting on, and making use of the promises of Jehovah, lay open to the people of God (gathered in one) the blessings which are hid in Christ. It is the LORD who gives all spiritual blessings, and these blessings are contained in Christ; but we must seek them with diligent, earnest prayer; and our prayers must be prayers of faith, founded upon the promises of God. "Thus saith the Lord God, I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them" (Ezek. xxxvi. 37).

¹ "My people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, *the fountain of living waters*, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water" (Jer. ii. 13).

The well by which the Christian loves to linger is that where Jesus revealed Himself as the source of life to the woman of Samaria. "Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life" (John iv. 14). The streams of Lebanon are those which "shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High" (Ps. xlv. 4).

Lebanon here, as in Canticles v. 15, represents the countenance of the Beloved.¹ In the face of Jesus Christ we have the light of the knowledge of the glory of God.² These streams flow from the very presence of Jesus risen and exalted. They issue from under the threshold of the sanctuary eastward (toward the sun-rising).³ They are clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. The LORD asks His ancient people, "Will a man leave the snow of

¹ "His countenance is as Lebanon, excellent as the cedars."

² "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. iv. 6).

³ "Afterward he brought me again unto *the door of the house*, and, behold, waters issued from under the threshold of the house eastward: for the forefront of the house stood toward the east, and the waters came down from under, from the right side of the house, at the south of the altar." The waters, increasing in depth as they continued their course, became too deep for even Ezekiel to pass through. Wherever they went they brought life and health. They seem evidently to signify the river of salvation flowing from Christ (the door). The promise to Eve is the first glimpse we have of them in Scripture, and as they continue toward the rising of the Sun of Righteousness, they become more and more full; and even now, as they roll on towards the close of this dispensation, and the coming to judgment of the Son of God, their depth and fulness seem ever increasing. We are told that the whole earth shall yet be covered with the knowledge of God's glory. John saw a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb (Rev. xxii. 1).

Lebanon, which cometh from the rock of the field? or shall the cold flowing waters that come from another place be forsaken?" (Jer. xviii. 14.) *When we walk after the imagination of our own hearts, we turn away from these refreshing, cooling streams of Lebanon.*

The river of God's pleasures is full; by it the earth is greatly enriched, and God's people are abundantly satisfied.¹

The closer we live to the source of these streams, the deeper shall be our joy in the LORD; and this joy of the LORD shall be our strength.

The shepherds, watching on Bethlehem's plains; Simeon, taking the infant Saviour in his arms; the disciples, on the Mount of Transfiguration; Paul, in the abundance of revelation; John, in Patmos, drank deeply of these streams. They are independent of circumstances; outward things cannot touch or defile them, or prevent their being supplied to the children of God.

"The Fountain" is essential to life. Without it the garden is desert.

"The Well" is essential to health. It supplies others as well as ourselves.²

"The Streams from Lebanon" are the very essence of joy.

Amongst the many blessings promised to the Church,

¹ "They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house; and thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures" (Ps. xxxvi. 8). "Thou visitest the earth, and waterest it; thou greatly enrichest it with the river of God, which is full of water" (Ps. lxxv. 9).

² "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money" (Isa. lv. 1). "*The Spirit and the Bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come: and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely*" (Rev. xxii. 17).

one is, that the Source of these streams shall be manifested to His people. "There the glorious LORD will be unto us a place of broad rivers and streams" (Isa. xxxiii. 21).

Christ, as the Fountain, gives life.

Christ, as the Well, supplies our thirsting souls, and satisfies all our wants.

Christ, as the Source whence flow the streams of Lebanon, gives earnest of future joy and glory.

Ver. 16. *Awake, O north wind ; and come, thou south ; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out. Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits.*

Awake ! It may be a command of the King. It may be a prayer of the Bride.

If a command, it must be obeyed. If a prayer, it must be answered. "Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son" (John xiv. 13).

The north wind is to awake, and its power seems to be *of an awakening nature*.

The wind is used in Scripture to signify the Spirit : "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth : so is every one that is born of the Spirit" (John iii. 8). In Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones, God said unto him, "Prophecy unto the wind, prophecy, son of man, and say to the wind, Thus saith the Lord God, Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live. So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet,

an exceeding great army" (Ezek. xxxvii. 9, 10). The Lord promises that the children of Israel (who resembled these bones) should be brought out of their graves, and adds, "*I shall put my Spirit in you, and ye shall live*" (ver. 14).

By comparing Zechariah vi. 5, 6 with Revelation vi. 5, 6, it would appear that the north wind brings *heavy judgment, and chastisement for sin*. Zechariah beheld four chariots drawn by horses of four different colours. He asked the angel, "What are these, my lord?" And the angel answered, "These are the four spirits (winds) of the heavens, which go forth from standing before the LORD of all the earth. *The black horses which are therein go forth into the north country; and the white go forth after them: and the grisled go forth toward the south country.*" John beheld the third seal opened, and heard the third living creature say, "Come and see." Then he saw, "and lo, *a black horse*; and he that sat on him had a pair of balances in his hand." And he heard "a voice in the midst of the four living creatures say, A measure of wheat for a penny, and three measures of barley for a penny; and see thou hurt not the oil and the wine."

The whirlwind seen by Ezekiel, when captive in the land of the Chaldeans, came "out of the north."¹ The effect of that whirlwind would be to destroy the image of jealousy at the door of the inner gate that looked toward the north in Jerusalem. "The Spirit lifted me up between the earth and the heaven, and brought me in the visions of God to Jerusalem, to the door of the inner gate that looketh toward the north, where was the seat of the image of jealousy, which provoketh to

¹ "And I looked, and behold, a whirlwind came out of the north" (Ezek. i. 4).

jealousy. And, behold, the glory of the God of Israel was there, according to the vision that I saw in the plain. Then said he unto me, Son of man, lift up thine eyes now the way toward the north. So I lifted up mine eyes the way toward the north, and behold, northward at the gate of the altar, this image of jealousy in the entry" (Ezek. viii. 3-5).

God will make use of heavy judgment to expel whatever stands between Him and His people. Anything which occupies the sanctuary, or entrance to the sanctuary, which should be His alone, will be unsparingly swept away by Him who is a jealous God.

Out of the north cometh destruction to Egypt (the land of darkness and bondage) and to Babylon (the land of captivity). "Egypt is like a very fair heifer, but *destruction cometh ; it cometh out of the north*" (Jer. xlv. 20). "Babylon is taken, Bel is confounded, Merodach is broken in pieces ; her idols are confounded, her images are broken in pieces. For out of the north there cometh up a nation against her, which shall make her land desolate, and none shall dwell therein ; they shall remove, they shall depart, both man and beast" (Jer. l. 2, 3).

To the people of God the wind from the north seems to portend a thorough purging, and severe searching investigation, and humbling. Thus Jeremiah saw a seething pot, and the face thereof toward the north. "Then the LORD said unto me, *Out of the north an evil shall break forth upon all the inhabitants of the land*. For, lo, I will call all the families of the kingdoms of the north, saith the LORD ; and they shall come, and they shall set every one his throne at the entering of the gates of Jerusalem, and against all the walls thereof

round about, and against all the cities of Judah. And I will utter my judgments against them touching all their wickedness, who have forsaken me, and have burned incense unto other gods, and worshipped the works of their own hands" (Jer. i. 13-16).

But not only is the north wind to awake, but the south wind is to come.

If the north wind bringeth cold, the south wind bringeth heat.¹

When the north wind has awakened and roused up from amongst the dead² the people of God, so often sleeping at their posts; when it has violently cast down imaginations and every high thing that exalteth itself against God: then a merciful Father quieteth the earth by a south wind.

As the white horses seen by Zechariah went forth after the black, so the south wind follows the north.³ "No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless, afterward, it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby" (Heb. xii. 11). This has always been the experience of the children of God. "Before I was

¹ "Cold out of the north" (Job xxxvii. 9). "And when the south wind blows, ye say, There will be heat: and it cometh to pass" (Luke xii. 55).

² "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead" (Eph. v. 14).

³ The white horses went out after the black; "and the grisled went forth toward the south country. And the bay went forth, and sought to go, that they might walk to and fro through the earth: and he said, Get ye hence, walk to and fro through the earth. So they walked to and fro through the earth. Then cried he upon me, and spake unto me, saying, Behold, these that go toward the north country *have quieted my spirit in the north country.*" Job tells us that "fair weather cometh out of the north" (Job xxxvii. 22); and certainly the effect of affliction upon the Church of God has always been beneficial.

afflicted I went astray, but now have I kept thy word" (Ps. cxix. 67).

Neither of these winds can blow upon the garden without the permission of Him who "bringeth the wind out of his treasures" (Jer. x. 13) ; and who "stayeth his rough wind in the day of his east wind" (Isa. xxvii. 8).

The King commands, or the Bride prays for, these winds, in order that the spices may flow out, viz., send forth a sweet savour of Christ in every place, that those outside the garden may perceive,¹ and that the name of Jesus may be honoured.

The Bride entreats that all obstacles to the presence of the King in the garden may be removed. It seems as if she expects His presence, when the spices flow out.

She wishes Him to come, that He may eat His pleasant fruits. The fruits are all His : the garden itself is redeemed ground, purchased by the death of its owner, planted by His hand, watered and made fruitful by His Spirit.

¹ It is *because* of the savour of the good ointments that the name of Christ is as ointment poured forth ; and therefore do the virgins love Him (Cant. i. 3).

CHAPTER V.

VER. 1. *I am come into my garden, my sister spouse :
I have gathered my myrrh with my spice ; I have
eaten my honey-comb with my honey ; I have drunk
my wine with my milk : eat, O friends ; drink, yea,
drink abundantly, O beloved.*

THE Bride has asked Him to come, and He answers, " *I am come.*" Even when about to leave the world, His words to His disciples were, "Lo, *I am* with you alway, unto the end of the age" (Matt. xxviii. 20). *He is in His garden*, for where two or three are gathered together in His name, there is He in the midst. The very name He bestows on her should assure her of the fact. The Brother would not desert the sister, the betrothed Husband would not leave the side of His spouse.

He reminds her of the past—" *I have gathered my myrrh with my spice.*" This He did when He gave His life a ransom for many. He speaks of the Church as His myrrh, His "sanctified ones." She is preserved, consecrated, sanctified in Him : and in offering Himself a sacrifice He has gathered together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad.¹ This people has he formed for Himself, that they should show forth

¹ "He prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation ; and not for that nation only, but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad" (John xi. 51, 52). "Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure, which he hath purposed in himself : that, in the dispensation of the fulness of times, he might gather together

His praise. As He is her myrrh, she is His ; and the spices (the work of His Spirit in her) are His also. To the great "I AM" there is no restraint of time ; and He beholds gathered together in one the members which to us appear so scattered and disunited. He has finished the work by means of which they are being gathered at different times, and from various places : therefore He says, "*I have gathered my myrrh with my spice.*" He adds, "*I have eaten my honey-comb with my honey.*" It is a thing past, even as He has gathered His myrrh. The 8th, 9th, and 10th verses of Psalm xix. show the honey and the honey-comb to be the commandment and the judgments of the LORD : "The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart : the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes : the fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever : the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired than gold, yea, than much fine gold ; sweeter also than honey and the honey-comb." Jesus magnified the law and made it honourable (Isa. xlii. 21). His meat was to do the will of His Father.¹ He fulfilled all righteousness.² His language was, "I delight to do thy will, O my God ! yea, *thy law is within my heart*" (Ps. xl. 8). This thorough fulfilling of the law of God enabled Him to bear the true and righteous judgment of God for us. It was that judgment against sin borne by Him, which drew from Him

in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth, even in him" (Eph. i. 9, 10).

¹ "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work" (John iv. 34).

² "And Jesus answering, said unto him, Suffer it to be so now : for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him" (Matt. iii. 15).

(the sinless One) the bitter cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matt. xxvii. 46).

"My son, eat thou honey, because it is good; and the honey-comb, which is sweet to thy taste: so shall the knowledge of wisdom be unto thy soul; when thou hast found it, then there shall be a reward, and thy expectation shall not be cut off" (Prov. xxiv. 13, 14).

Jesus, being good in God's sight, God gave unto Him wisdom, and knowledge, and joy.¹ The Spirit of the LORD rested upon Him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD (Isa. xi. 2). Though a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief, there was joy set before Him, and (in anticipation) He beheld the travail of His soul, and was satisfied.

It was prophesied of the infant Immanuel, "Butter and honey shall he eat, that he may know to refuse the evil, and choose the good." This food was also to be the food of the remnant left in the land. "Butter and honey shall every one eat that is left in the land" (Isa. vii. 15, 22). It appears that the butter signified strife;² which, in refusing evil, Jesus had to maintain (and which, for the same reason, His followers have to maintain) in the world. The honey was doubtless the commandment of the LORD, in which He, and all who really are His, delight.

Not only has Jesus eaten his honey-comb with his honey; but he *has also drunk his wine with his milk*. What was the wine which Jesus drank? When taking

¹ For God giveth to a man that is good in his sight wisdom, and knowledge, and joy" (Eccles. ii. 26).

² "Surely the churning of milk bringeth forth butter, and the wringing of the nose bringeth forth blood; so the forcing of wrath bringeth forth strife" (Prov. xxx. 33).

the last supper with His disciples, "He took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, Take this, and divide among yourselves ; for I say unto you, *I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God shall come*" (Luke xxii. 17, 18). *I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom* (Matt. xxvi. 29). The wine of which He speaks in Canticles v. 1 does not appear to be either the rejoicing in spirit of which we once read,¹ or rejoicing of any kind. On the contrary, it seems to be the wine of the fury of the LORD;² which, for the sake of His people, He took in their stead. Of this cup He prayed, saying, "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me ! nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt" (Matt. xxvi. 39). He had drunk this wine *with His milk*. It was with the submission of a child, Jesus drank this cup. "Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered" (Heb. v. 8). The perfect humanity of our Saviour is beautifully shown here. Milk is food for babes—*the first principles*. So Jesus is represented in Luke's narrative as growing, waxing strong in spirit, increasing in wisdom. As a child He behaved as a child, having the spirit of a child, learning

¹ "In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes : even so, Father, for so it seemeth good in thy sight" (Luke x. 21).

² "For in the hand of the LORD there is a cup, and the wine is red ; it is full of mixture, and he poureth out of the same ; but the dregs thereof, all the wicked of the earth shall wring out, and drink" (Ps. lxxv. 8). Jeremiah speaks of this cup (Jer. xxv. 15, 16) : "Thus saith the LORD God of Israel unto me, Take the wine-cup of this fury at my hand, and cause all the nations to whom I send thee to drink it." "And they shall drink, and be moved, and be mad, because of the sword that I will send among them."

and growing as a child. It was not a man in a child's body; it was *a sinless child, unnatural in this respect alone.*

Even with the milk, however, the wine had to be drunk. Doing and suffering the will of His Father, He had even from His cradle a life of trouble, though the anguish deepened the nearer He approached the cross.

Because of all this comes the invitation, repeated in various ways, and pervading the whole of the Divine Word, "*Eat, O friends.*" It is His friends whom He invites, nay, presses to eat; and has He not said, "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you"? (John xv. 14.) Those He invites were not always friends. It was *when they were enemies* they were reconciled to God by the death of His Son. Many now pressed to feast with the King were once aliens, strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world. Let us thank God that the enmity having been slain, the enemies may become friends, and appropriate the gracious invitation, "Eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved." "Ho, *every one that thirsteth*, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price" (Isa. lv. 1). He urges them to eat, as if they almost conferred a favour on Him by doing so; so compassionate, so loving, so unwearied in His yearning over His fallen creatures, is this incomparable friend! "Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? *Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness*" (ver. 2).

The friends are called on to eat *abundantly*, for here is no want of anything. Here is righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. This joy is the wine of which we may drink abundantly at the gospel feast; for the joy of the LORD is the Christian's strength; and we have a right to the joy, when faith accepts the peace made by the blood. When the Spirit has given us right understanding, we perceive with gratitude that *because our passover is slain, therefore we should keep the feast*—a life-long feast, of which the Supper of the Lord is the *outward sign*, showing to the world why it is (because of our Saviour dying for us) we have a joy with which the stranger intermeddleth not.

We are pressed to drink abundantly. "If God spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" (Rom. viii. 32.) The marginal reading is, "*be drunken with loves.*" Drink deeply of the Saviour's Spirit, till earthly things shall have no power to attract: till the love of Christ so constrain you that you count all things loss to win Him: till Jesus absorb every thought of your heart, and occupy every portion of your soul: till self be annihilated, and Christ be all in all. The more completely we surrender ourselves to Him, the more abundantly are we satisfied with the fulness of His house.

How warm is the invitation to the feast purchased by the sacrifice of Himself! How sweetly does He remind us of what it cost Him to offer us this abundant repast! With what name of tenderness does He close the appeal, "drink, yea, be drunken with loves, *O beloved.*" From the very depths of His heart of love He implores us to satiate our weary souls.

Ver. 2. *I sleep, but my heart waketh: it is the voice of my beloved that knocketh, Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled: for my head is filled with dew, my locks with the drops of the night.*

And how does the Bride answer this appeal? She had begged Him to come, and now that He is come, and invites her to feast on all the gospel promises, and to drink deep draughts of joy, which He (the source of joy) has provided for her, she sleeps! She is not ready yet; though her daily prayer is, "Thy kingdom come." She is not prepared for that kingdom of righteousness, and peace, and joy. It takes her by surprise to hear the Master's warning knock. When she hears it (and *apparently without shame*), she confesses "I sleep." Like the disciples in the garden, the time which should have been spent in watchfulness and prayer has been given to sleep. Yet she seems to fancy that because she is aware of her slothfulness there is no danger. She adds (as if that were precaution sufficient), "*my heart waketh.*" Alas! "He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool" (Prov. xxviii. 26), for "the heart is deceitful *above all*, and desperately wicked: who can know it?"

"*It is the voice of my beloved that knocketh.*" *It is thus Jesus knocks—with His voice; by His word.* She is His; therefore she recognises the voice to be His. "His sheep know his voice;" and the voice says, "*Open to me.*" Surely one would think there could be no delay; that before the words were uttered, the door of the heart would be opened; that she who owed Him so much, who loved Him so dearly, would hasten at the first sound of that dear voice. "Behold, I am standing at the door, and I am knocking: if any man hear my

voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and sup with him, and he with me" (Rev. iii. 20). What blessings we miss by our sloth, and by hearkening to the suggestions of our deceitful hearts; instead of at once opening when our Saviour calls! Thus many a joy escapes us; thus do our souls become dry and barren; thus do we bring on ourselves many a weary search after lost assurance, and sometimes almost begin to doubt our interest in Jesus. Whenever the Saviour's voice is heard, let that voice silence every other. *Let His word, even in the smallest particulars, be our law.* Let neither indolence, nor the inclinations of our earthly nature, dare to assert themselves in His presence. Then, and then only, may we expect to attain that fulness of joy which is expressed in the promise, "I will come in to him, and sup with him, and he with me."

The very names by which He appeals to her for admission are full of beauty.

"*My sister.*"—*The Elder Brother* thus entreats.

"*My love.*"—*He who loves her with an everlasting love, and who gave Himself for her,* begs admission.

"*My dove.*"—*He who has given her His Spirit* pleads with her.

"*My undefiled.*"—*He who has washed her from her sins in His own blood,* asks her to open to Him; for every name He gives her shows reason why she should let Him in.

But further, He appeals to her because of that in His nature which belongs to Him alone. He comes to her as the God-man: Immanuel, God with us. He says, "Open to me, *for my head is filled with dew.*" "The head of Christ is God" (1 Cor. xi. 3); and the dew is

the blessing of the LORD, the favour of the King.¹ He comes to convey to her *the fulness of blessing, above what she can ask or think*; that blessing which, in Almighty power, He is entitled to bestow.² He comes to her as God over all, bearing with Him all spiritual blessings, which He is willing and ready to shower upon her in abundance; "for it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell" (Col. i. 19). But He comes to her also as man. If His head be filled with dew, *His locks are wet with the drops of the night*. His locks are the tokens of subjection, of Him who made Himself of no reputation; signs of the shame which He endured for her sake; the veil which He threw over the God-head.³ They are proofs of the Nazariteship of the "Man of Sorrows;" who being separate from sinners devoted Himself to the LORD.

And these locks are wet with the drops of night; those drops of blood which were drawn forth by His agony on the night of His betrayal.⁴

How does she reply?—

¹ "As the dew of Hermon that descended upon the mountains of Zion; for there the LORD commanded the blessing, life for evermore" (Ps. cxxxiii.) "The king's wrath is as the roaring of a lion: but his favour as dew upon the grass" (Prov. xix. 12).

² "Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear" (Acts ii. 33).

³ "Doth not even nature itself teach you, that if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him?" (1 Cor. xi. 14.) This subject, as well as that of the Nazariteship, will be fully entered into when considering verse 11.

⁴ "And being in an agony, he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground" (Luke xxii. 44).

Ver. 3. *I have put off my coat ; how shall I put it on ?
I have washed my feet ; how shall I defile them ?*

There is no opening of the door. As at the appeal in the first verse she confesses *sleep*, at the appeal in the second she confesses *unreadiness*. She is not ready to open, and she is unfit, unprepared to appear before Him. She has indeed put off her coat ; for the garment of praise and the spirit of heaviness go not together and her very excuses prove that the beautiful clothing of humility has been laid aside.¹ The putting on of the coat was done for her by Christ ; the putting off is her own work, the consequence of her negligence, and love of ease. Why did she not remember that the blessing is *to him that watcheth and keepeth his garment*?² Those who do not watch need not expect to keep. She asks, "*How shall I put it on ?*" The slothful spirit still is there. The call is, "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, *and Christ shall give thee light*" (Eph. v. 14). "Awake, awake ; put on thy strength, O Zion ; put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city" (Isa. lii. 1). She would have known how to put them on had she followed on to know the LORD.³ Has she not put on Christ? And should she not in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let her requests be made known unto God? (Phil. iv. 6.) Might she not have trusted Him to supply

¹ "Be clothed with humility : for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble" (1 Pet. v. 5).

² "Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame" (Rev. xvi. 15).

³ "Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the LORD ; his going forth is prepared as the morning ; and he shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth" (Hos. vi. 3).

all her need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus? (Phil. iv. 19.)

She makes another excuse for not opening the door, and one which shows how far she has wandered from the truth through attending to the whisperings of her deceitful heart, and neglecting to watch and pray. "*I have washed my feet.*" She is ascribing to herself what Jesus does for His people. It is He who washes the disciples' feet;¹ and it is to Him alone the daily defilements, produced by contact with the world, must be brought. He it is who cleanseth us from "all unrighteousness." We cannot wash our feet any more than we can wash our whole body. It is Jesus who has done, and is doing both. The command, "Ye ought also to wash one another's feet" is obeyed by "speaking

¹ "Before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end." And in consequence of this love, and *to show the manner in which the love would act*, "he riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments" (put away everything that would hinder his work); "and took a towel and girded himself. After that he poureth water into a bason, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel *wherewith he was girded.*" On Peter's objecting, Jesus answered, "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me." And when Peter requested his hands and head might also be washed, the Saviour replied, "He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet" (which by contact with earth necessarily contracted defilement), "but is clean every whit." At the conclusion of this symbolic act He asked, "Know ye what I have done to you?" "If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another's feet" (John xiii. 1-14). It is to the washing which this act symbolized John refers when he says, "If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John i. 7-9).

the truth in love" (Eph. iv. 15), by pointing to the blood which cleanseth from all sin, and bearing one another's burdens before the throne of mercy. Thus the law of Christ is fulfilled.¹

She is attributing to herself the work of sanctification, forgetting that it is "not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost, which he shed on us abundantly, through Jesus Christ our Saviour" (Tit. iii. 5, 6): that Christ Jesus is of God made to his people, not only wisdom, righteousness, and redemption, but also *sanctification*; in order that whoso glorieth may glory *in the Lord* (1 Cor. i. 30, 31). Is she so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit is she seeking to be made perfect by the flesh? (Gal. iii. 3.) Does she not know that it is the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, which purges the conscience from dead works to serve the living God? (Heb. ix. 14.) Is she seeking to establish her own righteousness, and to bring herself under the curse of the law?² Does she fancy that *her washing* would ever fit her to appear before Him who is of purer eyes than to behold evil, and who cannot look on iniquity? (Hab. i. 13.) But not only does she boast of having washed her feet, but she asks, "*How shall I defile them?*" Her self-righteousness becomes more and more

¹ "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ" (Gal. vi. 2).

² "They, going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God" (Rom. x. 3). "As many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them" (Gal. iii. 10).

apparent, and more dishonouring to her Saviour. *She delays to open to Jesus lest her feet should be defiled.* Can presumption reach a higher pitch than this? And yet when Jesus calls *us* to some work, do we not often find excuses like this? Do we not imagine the work *beneath us*; or think what the world would say if we engaged in it; or deem ourselves and our reputation too pure to hazard our going into such and such places, when the Master's knock is summoning us, and His voice is telling us plainly in His Word to go forth to the streets and lanes, to the highways and hedges? It is those who are at ease in Zion whose feet are most defiled; those who are turning aside to tread in the world's footprints, and to enjoy the world's pleasures. Those who follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth (and it would be well for us to examine closely His manner of life upon earth) are not defiled. "They are without fault before the throne of God" (Rev. xiv. 4, 5).

Ver. 4. *My beloved put in his hand by the hole, and my bowels were moved for him (in me).*

The hand of Jesus is needed to rouse her. She cannot be left thus. He who loves her with an everlasting love will correct her in measure, and will not leave her altogether unpunished (Jer. xxx. 11). His hand of chastisement is a hand of mercy. She sees not her danger, but He sees it for her: and in fulfilment of His gracious promise, "Sin shall not have dominion over you," He will at any cost break her chains, and set the captive free. "Shall the prey be taken from the mighty, or the lawful captive be delivered? But thus saith the LORD, Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey of the terrible shall be delivered;

for I will contend with him that contendeth with thee, and I will save thy children" (Isa. xlix. 24, 25).

He put in His hand by the hole. *He knows the very spot where and when to lay His hand. And when He lays His hand she must open.* Nothing, even in the deepest recesses of the heart, is hidden from Him. By the hole, the means which His omniscient eye detects as the only way to reach the heart, He puts in His hand; and once His hand is felt, her proud obduracy gives way, her bowels are moved in her. How true it is that "thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power" (Ps. cx. 3). The moving appeal in the 3d verse had no other effect than to call forth her self-righteous applause; but when He lays His hand on the hole, the secret place which He knows when to touch, and how—then her bowels are moved, her latent love is roused, and the remembrance of who He is, and what He has done for the soul, melt her very heart.

Ver. 5. *I rose up to open to my beloved, and my hands dropped myrrh, and my fingers sweet-smelling myrrh, upon the handles of the lock.*

Everything is forgotten now except that He is there, and that she must see Him. Her sloth is conquered. His hand has done it,—His hand put in by the hole. There is no more thought of the washed feet or of the coat laid aside. She is all alacrity now. As she rises to open, her hands drop myrrh, and her fingers sweet-smelling myrrh, upon the handles of the lock—the handles which should have been opened at once, and close by where He has put His hand. There falls the sweet-smell myrrh,—there the memory of His love rises before her; and she apprehends the fragrance of

His offering, the sweet savour of His oblation. But she seems to perceive only to lose it. Never did she feel to appreciate it more than just at the moment when (through not attending to His voice) her part in the blessings He has purchased appears forfeited.

By faith her hands had handled the Word of life;¹ but now she feels as if He (the bundle of myrrh) were leaving her. *The sense of His nearness is passing away.*

Ver. 6. *I opened to my beloved; but my beloved had withdrawn himself, and was gone: my soul failed when he spake: I sought him, but I could not find him; I called him, but he gave me no answer.*

She has grieved the Holy Spirit of God, and the Comforter that should relieve her soul is far from her.² The voice which used to fill her with joy now troubles her; for the word is for reproof as well as for doctrine, for correction as well as for instruction in righteousness (2 Tim. iii. 16). No wonder her soul failed when He spake; for she has been seeking sanctification apart from Him. Her language has been, "I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing" (Rev. iii. 17): and now when He speaks, it is to rebuke. But this is not the worst. A heavier judgment awaits her, —when He ceases to make His voice heard; when He seems to leave her altogether to herself. She exclaims

¹ "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life" (1 John i. 1). That which the disciples did literally, we do by faith (handle the Word of life). When Thomas thrust his finger into the Saviour's hands, and his hand into the Saviour's side, Jesus said unto him, "Because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed" (John xx. 29).

² "The comforter that should relieve my soul is far from me" (Lam. i. 16).

in anguish, "*I sought him, but I could not find him; I called him, but he gave me no answer.*" "Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear; but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear" (Isa. lix. 1, 2). She may well lament and weep; for the Bridegroom is taken from her.¹ Her fall is greater than that in Canticles iii., for to indolence and love of ease has been added self-righteousness; and she must now learn what an evil thing and bitter it is to have forsaken the LORD her God.² Her own wickedness shall correct her, and her backslidings shall reprove her; therefore the LORD has covered Himself with a cloud, that her prayer should not pass through; also when she cries and shouts, He shutteth out her prayer.³

Ver. 7. *The watchmen that went about the city found me, they smote me, they wounded me; the keepers of the walls took away my veil from me.*

These watchmen, like those of Ephraim, are with their God.⁴ They are true to Him (whose servants they are) and true to her. They smote her; it was a kindness. They wounded her; and faithful are the wounds of a friend (Prov. xxvii. 6). The keepers of

¹ "Can the children of the bride-chamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? but the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast" (Matt. ix. 15).

² "Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee: know, therefore, and see, that it is an evil thing and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the LORD thy God" (Jer. ii. 19).

³ "Also when I cry and shout, he shutteth out my prayer." "Thou hast covered thyself with a cloud, that our prayer should not pass through" (Lam. iii. 8, 44).

⁴ "The watchman of Ephraim was with my God" (Hos. ix. 8).

the wall took away her veil from her. Unlike the prophets spoken of by Jeremiah, they discover her iniquity to turn away her captivity; and show her her burden, and the cause of her banishment.¹ They remove the veil which is spread over her;²—they show her *herself*; her natural deformity, and corruption, and uncleanness: they let her see that she is wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked (Rev. iii. 17). These faithful watchmen, set upon the walls of Zion by the LORD Himself, thus warn souls which wander as blind in the streets;³ and plead with the LORD for them, giving Him no rest, till He establish and make Jerusalem a praise in the earth.

Ver. 8. *I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if ye find my beloved, that ye tell him, that I am sick of love.*

The veil being taken away, her first desire is to see Jesus. She feels that her iniquities have removed her far from Him. She cannot take the stand she once did. She turns to those who follow Jesus at a distance, and charges them,—“If ye find my beloved, tell him that I am sick of love.” How unlike the charges she had previously given them!⁴ She who lay in His bosom, and was to Him as a daughter, now asks the prayers of others less

¹ “Thy prophets have seen vain and foolish things for thee; and they have not discovered thine iniquity, to turn away thy captivity; but have seen for thee false burdens, and causes of banishment” (Lam. ii. 14).

² Isaiah speaks of “the face of the covering cast over all people, and the veil that is spread over all nations,” which must yet be removed (Isa. xxv. 7). And Paul speaks of the veil upon the heart of the Jews, which prevents them seeing Jesus (2 Cor. iii. 14-16).

³ “They have wandered blind in the streets” (Lam. iv. 14).

⁴ The previous addresses to the daughters of Jerusalem are recorded, Cant. ii. 7, iii. 5.

favoured. These daughters of Jerusalem had wept for the sufferings of Jesus, and heard words of love and pity from His mouth, but they had never enjoyed the close fellowship she had done ; had never entered the chamber of the King ; never lain resting beneath, and contemplating, undisturbed, that wondrous banner of love hung over her ; all the while feasting on the glorious promises which He had so thickly strewn around her.

The moment we take our eyes from Christ, and seek beauty in ourselves—that moment is the beginning of a fall, which, if not arrested by the merciful hand of a covenant God, would be utter destruction. The chastening of the LORD is heavy, but we must bear it—must bear that others less advanced in Divine life know that our peace is disturbed, that our joy is departed, that the Comforter has for a time withdrawn from us the sense of our Saviour's presence.

“God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble” (James iv. 6). In her extremity, help is at hand. The very humility of her question proves that grace is being imparted. “*If ye find my beloved.*” You may find Him before I do ; I slighted my privileges ; I neglected His injunction to watch and pray. I deserve to be cast out from His presence. If you find Him, tell Him my state ; bear my burden before the throne of grace ; “*tell him that I am sick of love.*”

Here is ground for hope, though the words sound as of despair. None were ever sick of love for Christ, hungering, thirsting, panting after Him, in vain. It is the parched ground which shall become a pool, the thirsty land which shall become springs of water. (Not only having water in itself, but honoured to be the means of supplying water to others, Isa. xxxv. 7.)

Ver. 9. *What is thy beloved more than beloved, O thou fairest among women? what is thy beloved more than beloved, that thou dost so charge us?*

They appear scarcely able to understand her. They seem to fancy it is her love for Him which invests Him with attraction and grace; just as many feel the eloquent preacher has made "Christ crucified" an object of interest to them which He never was before. Her state, unhappy as it is, is far preferable to theirs. They do not see the beauty of Jesus as she does. They do not hunger and thirst after Him. They do not crave His presence, and feel that *that alone* is life. They are satisfied with a dim and distant view. *They are content to know Him at a distance.* They do not fully comprehend His finished work. They see the cross *afar off*, and lament the sufferings He had to bear: *but to be crucified with Him, to die with Him, to be risen with Him to newness of life—: this is all beyond them!*

Perhaps it was to awaken such as these that Paul could have wished himself separated from Christ. The separation of the Bride from the Bridegroom led to these very daughters seeking Him with her. Thus her fall became their riches, and brought an accession of glory to her Saviour-God. They call her "*fairest among women.*" They see her beauty, though so dull in perceiving His: and it is when completely forgetting herself in the all-engrossing work of seeking Him, that her beauty becomes so noticeable by others.

In this earnest self-renouncing search she has become (unconsciously to herself) a living epistle known and read of all; and this epistle is an invitation to others to seek that Saviour in whom she sees such

beauty that she counts all things but loss that she may find and be found in Him.

“*What is thy beloved more than beloved, that thou dost so charge us?*” “What is the special beauty in Christ that He should be preferred to all others, and that unless you feel His presence you are wretched? You love Him, and you have a right to love Him; but you may love other things too, and thus let your mind be diverted from its distracting grief.” Practically, is not this the meaning of “What is thy beloved more than beloved?” And do not the *lives* of many, even of those who we believe belong to Christ, continually ask this question? So many things come before Christ, that His place is low indeed; and when His cause is spoken of as paramount to all others, and His glory and the spread of His kingdom made the sole aim of life, how many unite to cry, “What is thy beloved more than beloved, that thou dost so charge us?”

The answer of the Bride is ready, and it is of exquisite beauty. *She at once describes Jesus, as revealed to her by the Spirit*: for the natural man understandeth not the things of the Spirit of God. To him there is no beauty in Christ that he should admire Him. But God has revealed to those who love Him such beauty as passeth man’s understanding; for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.

Ver. 10. *My beloved is white and ruddy, the chiefest among ten thousand (a standard-bearer).*

She exclaims (as if she beholds Him), “My beloved is *white*.” *White!* It is His sinlessness she sees first, and it is that she loves: the very thing from which an unrenewed nature shrinks. Even though this white-

ness condemn her, even though beside it she feels so black and unclean, still it is her admiration, her delight. If our beloved be not white, He is not the beloved spoken of here. Let us look well to this! The Saviour is perfectly holy; He cannot bear sin; His nature loathes it. "Holy, holy, holy is our Lord God Almighty" (Rev. iv. 8). If Jesus were not white, He could not have been a fit substitute for us. He could not have satisfied the Father's demand. The lamb must be *without blemish and without spot*.¹ But further she adds, My beloved is "*ruddy*." *The lamb is white, but it is a lamb slain*. The blood must be there, or the holiness cannot save: "for it is the blood which maketh atonement for the soul" (Lev. xvii. 11). The thought of the blood pervades the whole of God's revelation to man; it is for sake of "the blood" He pardons. *He looks upon it, and is satisfied; she looks upon it, and takes refuge beneath it, and is saved*. Well may she rejoice in the whiteness and ruddiness which the Spirit has revealed to her in Jesus, and, pointing to her Substitute, thank God that "this man hath done nothing amiss" (Luke xxiii. 41), and that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin (1 John i. 7).

She calls Him "the chiefest among ten thousand." This number is much used in Scripture to denote a great multitude. Thus Moses speaks of the ten thousands of Ephraim; and the women of Israel lauded David's prowess, to the great displeasure of Saul, by saying, "Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten

¹ "Your lamb shall be *without blemish*" (Exod. xii. 5). "Ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Pet. i. 18, 19).

thousands" (1 Sam. xviii. 7). The Psalmist, expressing his confidence in God, says, "I will not be afraid of ten thousands of the people" (Ps. iii. 6): and desiring the prosperity of Israel, prays that their "sheep may bring forth thousands and *ten thousands* in their streets" (Ps. cxliv. 13). Micah asks, "Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with *ten thousands* of rivers of oil?" (Micah vi. 7.) Daniel, describing the victories of the king of the South, says, "He shall cast down *ten thousands*" (Dan. xi. 12). Paul reminds the Corinthians that though they have "*ten thousand* instructors in Christ, yet have they not many fathers" (1 Cor. iv. 15). Jude tells us that Enoch prophesied of Christ, "Behold, the Lord cometh with *ten thousand saints*" (Jude 14). When Daniel would give an idea of the immense multitude standing before the "Ancient of days," he said, "Ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him" (Dan. vii. 10). And John, speaking of the angels surrounding the throne, tells us "the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands" (Rev. v. 11).

Amongst all these multitudes Jesus is supreme. "Wherefore" (because of His whiteness and ruddiness, His purity and His death) "God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth" (Phil. ii. 9, 10).

The marginal reading represents him as "*a standard-bearer*." See Him thus: "And he, bearing his cross, went forth into a place called the place of a skull" (John xix. 17). "Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach. For here have

we no continuing city, but we seek one to come" (Heb. xiii. 13, 14). It was this standard Paul gloried in when he exclaimed, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation, to every one that believeth" (Rom. i. 16). To them which are saved, the preaching of the cross is the power of God (1 Cor. i. 18). By it the world is to be won to Christ: "Thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I will lift up mine hand to the Gentiles, and set up my standard to the people: and they shall bring thy sons in their arms, and thy daughters shall be carried upon their shoulders" (Isa. xlix. 22). Jesus, the captain of our salvation, has been given by God, "a witness to the people, a leader and commander to the people" (Isa. lv. 4). In order to bring many sons unto glory, our standard-bearer has been made perfect through sufferings;¹ and if any will come after him, he must deny *himself*, and take up his cross, and follow whithersoever He leads. By the Cross of Christ the world is crucified unto us, and we unto the world.² When the enemy comes in like a flood the Spirit of the LORD lifts up this standard³ (the Cross of Christ) against him. In Zechariah ix. 16 we are told that the people of God "shall be as the stones of a crown, lifted up as an ensign upon his land." They will then be a visibly united people (many stones, but one crown), and kept in the glorious position they occupy by the power of

¹ "For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings" (Heb. ii. 10).

² "But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, whereby the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world" (Gal. vi. 14).

³ "When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the LORD shall lift up a standard against him" (Isa. lix. 19).

God through faith. This is the time spoken of by Paul as the manifestation of the sons of God. In that day the preaching of the gospel shall be no longer despised. "The root of Jesse shall stand for an ensign of the people: to it shall the Gentiles seek, and his rest shall be glory. He shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth" (Isa. xi. 10, 12). "All ye inhabitants of the world and dwellers on the earth, see ye, when he lifteth up an ensign on the mountains; and when he bloweth a trumpet, hear ye" (Isa. xviii. 3).

Ver. 11. *His head the most fine gold; his locks bushy, black as a raven.*

"*The head of Christ is God*" (1 Cor. xi. 3). Jesus said, "I and my Father are one" (John x. 30). This head is the most fine gold; the perfection of wisdom,¹ the source of wisdom—for wisdom and might are His; and it is He who giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding.² "By wisdom he hath founded the earth, by understanding hath he established the heavens" (Prov. iii. 19). He is the only wise God.³

¹ The reason for taking gold to represent wisdom is given when considering Cant. i. 11.

² "Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever; for wisdom and might are his: and he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings and setteth up kings: he giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding; he revealeth the deep and secret things; he knoweth what is in the darkness, and the light dwelleth with him" (Dan. ii. 20-22). In the image of Nebuchadnezzar's dream the head (Babylon) was of fine gold—not the most fine gold. The wisdom of the mystical Babylon has always been great; but, descending not from above, it is earthly, sensual, devilish; whereas the wisdom of God is pure (see James iii. 15-17).

³ "To God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ, for ever.

The gold is *most fine*, for the wisdom which is from above is *pure*.

But this head of most fine gold is veiled by *His locks*; the tokens of His shame,¹ who being in the form of God, and equal with God, yet made Himself of no reputation; bearing reproach, being despised and rejected, a reproach of men, and despised of the people; set at nought, mocked, derided, railed at.²

This shame He suffered for sake of her—His mystical body, His bride—taking her place, and learning obedience by the things which He suffered.³

These locks were bushy, or curled, completely covering and concealing the head of most fine gold. Thus was the

Amen" (Rom. xvi. 27). "Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the *only wise God*, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen" (1 Tim. i. 17).

¹ "For a man, indeed, ought not to cover his head, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man." "Doth not even nature itself teach you, that if a man have long hair it is a shame unto him?"

² "For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me" (Rom. xv. 3). "He is despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not" (Isa. liii. 3).

³ "I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people" (Ps. xxii. 6). The first part of this Psalm gives a vivid description of the complete veiling of the Godhead of Christ and the shame he underwent.

"Herod with his men of war set him at nought, and mocked him, and arrayed him in a gorgeous robe, and sent him again to Pilate." "And the soldiers also mocked him." "And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him" (Luke xxiii. 11, 36, 39). "And they clothed him with purple, and platted a crown of thorns, and put it about his head. And began to salute him, Hail, King of the Jews! And they smote him on the head with a reed, and did spit upon him, and, bowing their knees, worshipped him" (Mark xv. 17-19; Matt. xxvii.; John xix.) "Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered. And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him" (Heb. v. 8, 9).

Godhead veiled. "We know this man whence he is" (John vii. 27). "Shall Christ come out of Galilee?" (ver. 41.) "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? how is it then that he saith, I came down from heaven?" (John vi. 42.) "Is not this the carpenter? And they were offended in him" (Mark vi. 3; Matt. xiii. 55).

They were *black*. In the full vigour of youth, His eye undimmed by age, His natural force unabated (save by sorrow), He was cut off out of the land of the living.¹ Unlike Ephraim, whose grey hairs here and there upon him indicated approaching decay, of which he was unaware²—the locks of Jesus were black and bushy. He was taken away in the prime of life. The days of His youth were shortened, and he was covered with dishonour. The slain lamb which typified the Saviour was to be a male of the first year.³

But further, these locks were black *as a raven*; that unclean and hateful bird.⁴ As the dove was chosen to be the emblem of the Holy Spirit, so the raven seems to symbolize the unholy flesh, the unclean nature.

The locks of Jesus were *black as a raven*. "In the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh" (Rom. viii. 3). "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin" (2 Cor. v. 21). "His own self bare our sins *in his own body* on the tree" (1 Pet. ii. 24). It was the blackness of these locks

¹ "He was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken" (Isa. liii. 8).

² "Grey hairs are here and there (sprinkled) upon him, yet he knoweth it not" (Hosea vii. 9).

³ "Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year" (Exod. xii. 5).

⁴ In Lev. xi. 15, and Deut. xiv. 14, "Every raven after his kind" was named as unclean, and to be had in abomination.

which enabled the Bride to exclaim (though knowing the blackness was all her own), "I am comely!" He was made sin for her, that she might be made the righteousness of God in Him (2 Cor. v. 21). When John saw Him in Revelation, His locks were no longer black: "His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow"¹ (Rev. i. 14). The sins had been removed, according to the gracious promise of our God (which, like all His promises, are yea and amen in Christ), "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be *as white as snow*; though they be red like crimson, they shall be *as wool*" (Isa. i. 18). "And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment; so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time, without sin, unto salvation" (Heb. ix. 27, 28).

But the locks of Jesus had other deep significance. *They marked the Nazarite.* "And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When either man or woman shall separate themselves to vow a vow of a Nazarite, to separate themselves unto the LORD; he shall separate himself from wine and strong drink, and shall drink no vinegar of wine, or vinegar of strong drink, neither shall he drink any liquor of grapes, nor eat moist grapes, or dried. All the days of his separation shall he eat nothing that is made of the vine tree, from the kernels even to the husk. All the days of the vow of his separation there shall no razor come upon his head: until the days be fulfilled, in the which he separateth himself unto the LORD, he shall be holy, and shall let the locks of the hair of his head grow. All the days that he separateth

¹ So also in the description given by Daniel (vii. 9) of the "Ancient of days" sitting in judgment.

himself unto the LORD he shall come at no dead body. He shall not make himself unclean for his father, or for his mother, for his brother, or for his sister, when they die; because the consecration of his God is upon his head. All the days of his separation he is holy unto the LORD. And if any man die very suddenly by him, and he hath defiled the head of his consecration, then he shall shave his head in the day of his cleansing, on the seventh day shall he shave it.

“And on the eighth day he shall bring two turtles, or two young pigeons, to the priest, to the door of the tabernacle of the congregation: and the priest shall offer the one for a sin-offering, and the other for a burnt-offering, and make an atonement for him, for that he sinned by the dead, and shall hallow his head that same day. And he shall consecrate unto the LORD the days of his separation, and shall bring a lamb of the first year for a trespass-offering; but the days that were before shall be lost, because his separation was defiled.

“And this is the law of the Nazarite: When the days of his separation are fulfilled, he shall be brought unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation; and he shall offer his offering unto the LORD, one he-lamb of the first year without blemish for a burnt-offering, and one ewe-lamb of the first year without blemish for a sin-offering, and one ram without blemish for peace-offerings, and a basket of unleavened bread, cakes of fine flour mingled with oil, and wafers of unleavened bread anointed with oil, and their meat-offering, and their drink-offerings.

“And the priest shall bring them before the LORD, and shall offer his sin-offering, and his burnt-offering. And he shall offer the ram for a sacrifice of peace-offerings unto the LORD, with the basket of unleavened bread;

the priest shall offer also his meat-offering, and his drink-offering.

"And the Nazarite shall shave the head of his separation at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and shall take the hair of the head of his separation, and put it in the fire which is under the sacrifice of the peace-offerings.

"And the priest shall take the sodden shoulder of the ram, and one unleavened cake out of the basket, and one unleavened wafer, and shall put them upon the hands of the Nazarite, after the hair of his separation is shaven : and the priest shall wave them a wave-offering before the LORD ; this is holy for the priest, with the wave-breast and heave-shoulder : and after that the Nazarite may drink wine.

"This is the law of the Nazarite who hath vowed, and of his offering unto the LORD for his separation, besides that that his hand shall get ; according to the vow which he vowed, so he must do after the law of his separation" (Numb. vi.)

The life of Jesus was one of complete consecration to the LORD : "Lo, I come : in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God ; yea, thy law is within my heart" (Ps. xl. 7, 8 ; quoted of Christ, Heb. x. 7). "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work" (John iv. 34). "For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me" (John vi. 38). Though accused of being "a gluttonous man and a wine-bibber," He was "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." His heart was not gladdened by the joys of other men, and He abstained from pleasures that might have been lawful, in order to devote Himself wholly to His Father's business. His soul grieved



for those who cared not for Him, and who thought little of the heavy burden He was bearing for their sakes. How beautifully does He lament their strange indifference, or their studied insults!—

“False witnesses did rise up : they laid to my charge *that I knew not*. They rewarded me evil for good, to the spoiling of my soul. But as for me, *when they were sick my clothing was sackcloth : I humbled my soul with fasting*; and my prayer returned into my own bosom.¹ I behaved myself as though he had been my friend or brother : *I bowed down heavily*, as one that mourneth for his mother. But in mine adversity they rejoiced, and gathered themselves together; yea, the abjects gathered themselves together unto me, and I knew not; they did tear me, and ceased not : with hypocritical mockers in feasts, they gnashed upon me with their teeth” (Ps. xxxv. 11-16).

Though receiving sinners, and eating with them, He was separate from sinners, touching no unclean thing, hating even the garment spotted of the flesh; for the consecration of his God was upon him, and he was holy unto the LORD. Upon Him the Spirit of the LORD rested. In Him, the Christ, the Anointed, was fulfilled *all* righteousness. He knew no sin.

When the days of his separation were accomplished, the Nazarite, having offered unto the LORD the burnt-offering, the sin-offering, and the peace-offering, took the hair of the head of his separation and put it in the fire which was under the sacrifice of the peace-offerings.

¹ The sickness for which Jesus clothed Himself in sackcloth is thus described by Isaiah : “The whole head is sick, and the whole heart is faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head, there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores : they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment” (Isa. i. 5, 6).

Then the wave-offering was presented to the LORD, and after that the Nazarite might drink wine.

When the hour was come, the Saviour (in presenting to Jehovah the one sacrifice of Himself, a burnt-offering, a sin-offering, and a peace-offering) *laid down the likeness of sinful flesh, and thus parted the black locks at Calvary*—those locks, so “bushy,” that even the Father could not (consistently with justice) look upon the head of fine gold they concealed;—so “black,” that He had to turn away His face, while the bitter cry issued from the lips of the agonized Son, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”

It was prophetically contemplating this agony that David exclaimed, “There is no soundness in my flesh, because of thine anger; neither rest (peace, or health) in my bones, because of my sin. For mine iniquities are gone over mine head; as an heavy burden they are too heavy for me” (Ps. xxxviii. 3, 4). “Mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up: they are more than the hairs of mine head: therefore my heart faileth me” (Ps. xl. 12).

And now the work is done—“it is finished;” and Jesus is no longer bound. *The Nazarite may enter into the joy set before him.* The “Man of Sorrows” is the “King of Glory;” and his kingdom is one of righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost¹ (Rom. xiv. 17). The freed Nazarite will not feast alone. To His disciples He appointed a meeting and a feast, when His kingdom shall be fulfilled. All over the world guests are being bidden to His marriage-supper;

¹ “Wine, which maketh glad the heart of man,” is taken as the symbol of joy, “for the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and *joy* in the Holy Ghost.”

and when those first invited will not come, the highways, and streets, and lanes of the city are scoured, and the poor, maimed, halt, and blind brought in. The invitation is sounded continually, "Ho, every one that thirsteth." Not merely milk, but wine is offered: *present supplies of grace, and foretastes of greater bliss hereafter*. All earthly festivity seems but as the crackling of thorns beneath the pot, compared to the heavenly feast prophesied by Isaiah: "In this mountain shall the LORD of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined" (Isa. xxv. 6). "Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage-supper of the Lamb" (Rev. xix. 9).

The Nazarite's vow is indeed fulfilled. The bushy black locks have been burned up by the fire of God's wrath; and Jesus stands free to work out the glorious purpose for which He came to earth, and took upon Him the form of a servant: free to come at poor dead souls, and quicken them by His life-giving Spirit. "For as the Father hath life in himself, so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself; and hath given him authority to execute judgment also, *because he is the Son of man*" (John v. 26, 27). "You hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. ii. 1). Every soul raised from the sleep of death is a fruit of this glorious sacrifice; and at the last day the voice of Jesus is to be the trumpet-sound at which all that are in the graves must rise to judgment.¹

¹ "Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation" (John v. 28, 29).

Before Jesus of Nazareth appeared on earth souls had been born again ; but it was in view of this atonement that their iniquities were forgiven and their sins covered.

To Jehovah, Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son, was the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. "*He verily was fore-ordained before the foundation of the world ; but was manifest in these last times for you, who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory*" (1 Pet. i. 20, 21).

Jesus of Nazareth, as an example only, never could have reached at and rescued the soul of man. "*Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone ; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit*" (John xii. 24).

Ver. 12. *His eyes as of doves by the rivers of waters, washed with milk, fitly set (sitting in fulness ; i.e. fitly placed, and set as a precious stone in the foil of a ring):*

Those eyes (which run to and fro through the earth,¹ which are in every place, beholding the evil and the good) *possessed spiritual discernment (quick and clear) in seeing His Father's will ; yet had no sight for aught else.* "Who is blind, but my servant ? or deaf, as my messenger that I sent ? who is blind as he that is perfect, and blind as the LORD'S servant ? Seeing many things, but thou observest not ; opening the ear ; but he heareth not" (Isa. xlii. 19, 20). He meekly waited on His Father for direction, and trusted in all

¹ "For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect towards him" (2 Chron. xvi. 9). "The eyes of the LORD are in every place, beholding the evil and the good" (Prov. xv. 3).



things to His guidance. He who is to judge the quick and the dead, when on earth judged no man.¹

The eyes which in the Revelation are described as a flame of fire,² are seen on earth by the Bride, as the eyes of doves *by the rivers of waters*—those rivers which shall make glad the city of God, which are full of spiritual pleasures, and which with their inexhaustible fullness greatly enrich the earth.³

These waters issue from the sanctuary (the meeting-place between God and man), and, deepening as they flow, pass through the desert to the sea, bearing life and health to all within their reach; and having on the banks all trees for meat, “whose leaf shall not fade, neither shall the fruit thereof be consumed.” These waters, which in some places a child can pass through, are in others impassable even by the Heaven-inspired, deep-seeing prophet:⁴ for they are waters to swim in, a

¹ “I judge no man” (John viii. 15). “And if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not; for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world” (John xii. 47).

² “His eyes were as a flame of fire” (Rev. i. 14). “Who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire” (Rev. ii. 18). “His eyes were as a flame of fire” (Rev. xix. 12).

³ “There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High” (Ps. xli. 4). “Thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures” (Ps. xxxvi. 8). “Thou visitest the earth, and waterest it: thou greatly enrichest it with the river of God, which is full of water” (Ps. lxxv. 9).

⁴ “Afterward he brought me again unto the door of the house; and, behold, waters issued out from under the threshold of the house eastward: *for the fore-front of the house stood toward the east*, and the waters came down from under, from the right side of the house, at the south of the altar. Then brought he me out of the way of the gate northward, and led me about the way without unto the outer gate by the way that looketh eastward; and, behold, there ran out waters on the right side. And when the man that had the line in his hand went forth eastward, he measured a thousand cubits, and he brought me through the waters; the waters were up to the

river that cannot be passed over, a river of unutterable, incomprehensible love, as shown in the salvation of a lost world. "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the LORD? or who hath been his counsellor? or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen" (Rom. xi. 33-36).

On earth this river has been fouled by the feet of false prophets, self-seeking men, who turn the truth of God into a lie, who corrupt the pure gospel of the grace

ankles. Again he measured a thousand, and brought me through the waters; the waters were to the knees. Again he measured a thousand, and brought me through; the waters were to the loins. Afterward he measured a thousand; a river that I could not pass over: for the waters were risen, waters to swim in, a river that could not be passed over. And he said unto me, Son of man, hast thou seen this? Then he brought me, and caused me to return to the brink of the river. Now, when I had returned, behold, at the bank of the river were very many trees, on the one side and on the other. Then said he unto me, These waters issue out toward the east country, and go down into the desert, and go into the sea; which being brought forth into the sea, the waters shall be healed. And it shall come to pass, that everything that liveth, which moveth, whithersoever the rivers shall come, shall live; and there shall be a very great multitude of fish, because these waters shall come thither: for they shall be healed; and everything shall live whither the river cometh. And it shall come to pass, that the fishers shall stand upon it from En-gedi even unto En-eglain; they shall be a place to spread forth nets: their fish shall be according to their kinds, as the fish of the great sea, exceeding many. But the miry places thereof and the marshes thereof shall not be healed; they shall be given to salt. And by the river upon the bank thereof, on this side and on that side, shall grow all trees for meat, whose leaf shall not fade, neither shall the fruit thereof be consumed; it shall bring forth new fruit according to his months, because their waters they issued out of the sanctuary; and the fruit thereof shall be for meat, and the leaf thereof for medicine" (Ezek. xlvii. 1-12).

of God, and who preach themselves, not Christ Jesus the Lord.¹

In heaven the river is *pure*, "clear as crystal;" reflecting the image of God, unsullied by man's imaginings and delusions; and proceeding out of the midst of the throne of God and of the Lamb: giving the impression that the Gospel of salvation originates in the Eternal Counsel, is everlasting as the throne of the Triune God; and that *there*, it reflects in perfection the glorious attributes (love, mercy, and truth) of Jehovah.

Jesus sits by this river. Need we ask why? To invite the weary and heavy laden to refresh themselves; to excite in such as the woman of Samaria desire for a better life and more satisfying pleasures (for whosoever drinketh of the water that Christ gives, shall never thirst; for the water which He gives shall be a well of

¹ Thus Jehovah addresses the hireling shepherds of Israel: "Seemeth it a small thing unto you to have eaten up the good pasture, but ye must tread down with your feet the residue of your pastures? and to have drunk the deep waters, but ye must foul the residue with your feet? And as for my flock, they eat that which ye have trodden with your feet; and they drink that which ye have fouled with your feet" (Ezek. xxxiv. 18, 19). Paul says of himself, "For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God" (2 Cor. ii. 17). He warns the Galatians thus: "There be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed" (Gal. i. 7, 8). Every perversion of the Gospel (which issues *pure* from the throne of God) is a fouling of the water of life. We must always remember that the Gospel comes from *God himself in Christ*. Therefore it is represented as issuing from "*the door of the sanctuary*," the one way of entrance, the meeting-place between God and man. "And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, the tree of life, which bare twelve fruits, and yielded her fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree for the healing of the nations" (Rev. xxii. 1, 2).

water springing up into everlasting life, John iv. 14); to call on every one to come to these waters, which He gives without money and without price.

From Genesis to Revelation the invitations are numerous and urgent. Some of the last verses of the Scriptures represent the Spirit urging the acceptance of the life-giving waters: "The Spirit and the Bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come: and *whosoever will*, let him take the waters of life freely" (Rev. xxii. 17).

As Jesus sits by the river of life, the Bride observes the beauty of His eyes, which are as eyes of doves "*washed with milk*,"—the sincere milk of the Word. Discerning His Father's will in all things, every thought, every word, every action was guided by the word which was hid within His heart.

"Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to thy word" (Ps. cxix. 9). He could exclaim, "O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day. Thou, through thy commandments, hast made me wiser than mine enemies; for they are ever with me. I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the ancients; because I keep thy precepts" (Ps. cxix. 97-100).

His earnest prayer for His disciples was, that God would cleanse them by His word. "*Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth. And for their sakes I sanctify myself*, that they also might be sanctified through the truth" (John xvii. 17, 19). The doves' eyes washed in milk denote the spiritual sight cleansed from all mists and dimness, which might rise to prevent them seeing distinctly. It is *in the Word of God*,

the spiritually-minded man gets his sight cleared, and his discernment made more keen as to the things of God. Jesus being perfect man as well as perfect God, condescended to human means of enlightenment as to the will and thoughts of His Father. His conduct and His words alike direct us "to the law and to the testimony."¹

His eyes were fitly set (sitting in fulness). The Spirit was given to Him without measure.² In Him were fulfilled the prophecies of Isaiah, "The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge, and of the fear of the LORD; and shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the LORD: and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: but with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth" (Isa. xi. 2-4). "The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek: he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD" (Isa. lxi. 1, 2).

There could be no mistake in His reading of His Father's will, in His Father's Word. Man may fail to perceive its meaning; and in the Word are depths no human eye can search into: but to Jesus all was clear and bright. Breadth and length, and depth and height

¹ "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isa. viii. 20).

² "God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him" (John iii. 34).

were all revealed : and this is what especially distinguished Him while on earth. Not merely His thorough acquaintance with the Word ; but *the manner in which He applied it (showing the depth of His spiritual discernment, and the complete submission of His whole being to its directions)*. How beautifully He expresses this submission in His conversation with His disciples after His resurrection ! “ O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken ! Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory ? ” (Luke xxiv. 25, 26.) “ Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day : and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem ” (Luke xxiv. 46, 47). The Bride exclaims of these doves’ eyes washed in milk, “ they are fitly placed,” *i.e.* set as a precious stone in the foil of a ring. She cannot but admire the beauty of those eyes which always clearly reflected the will of God and the brightness of the Father’s countenance. In them she sees what He is. God condescending to become man, and man’s example ; taking the precepts intended for man’s guidance as the rule of His life, and thus fulfilling all righteousness.¹

Ver. 13. *His cheeks as a bed of spices, sweet flowers ;
(towers of perfumes ;)*

It is from Jesus the Bride has obtained the spices which adorn and make sweet her garden—from His countenance. The spices grow there ; it is their native

¹ He was baptized of John, though having nothing of which to repent, and assigned as His reason, “ Thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness ” (Matt. iii. 15).

place. They come from heaven, and it is He who has brought them to earth. They sent forth all their sweetness when He was in the hands of His enemies, to whose brutality He submitted without a murmur; who tortured and reviled Him, striking the Judge of Israel with a rod upon the cheek.¹ From that bruised bed of spices arises a sweet perfume of uncomplaining patience and meekness, a charity which "beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things" (1 Cor. xiii. 7); an incense acceptable to God, and which He alone can fully appreciate. "He *was* bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace *was* upon him; and with his stripes we are healed" (Isa. liii. 5). Now "He ever liveth to make intercession for us" (Heb. vii. 25); intercession which is as incense to the Most High, and which, mingled with the prayers of the saints,² causes them to be accepted — "*sweet flowers*," never fading nor losing their sweetness; "*towers of perfume*," storehouses full of everything which is pleasing to God and needed by man.

¹ "They shall smite the Judge of Israel with a rod upon the cheek" (Mic. v. 1). "Then did they spit in his face, and buffeted him; and others smote him with the palms of their hands (or rods)." "And they spit upon him, and took the reed, and smote him on the head" (Matt. xxvi. 67; xxvii. 30). "And they smote him on the head with a reed, and did spit upon him" (Mark xv. 19). "Who when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously" (1 Pet. ii. 23).

² "The four living creatures, and four-and-twenty elders, fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours (incense), which are the prayers of saints" (Rev. v. 8). "And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense that he should offer with (add to) the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne" (Rev. viii. 3).

When pride rises within us, when we cannot forgive as we hope to be forgiven, when we search vainly in our own hearts for the spirit of universal love which distinguished our Master, let us have recourse to these towers of perfume, let us knock loud and long, and never cease till we obtain what we need. His stores are inexhaustible. Why do we not seek from the Beloved some portion of His spirit? We think too little of the example of Jesus. We care too little to have the very mind of Christ.

His lips lilies, dropping sweet-smelling myrrh:

How sweet were the lips of Jesus, and how by His gentle patient teaching, "line upon line, precept upon precept," He increased the knowledge of His disciples!¹ The wisdom of His lips dispersed knowledge; while by their righteousness they fed many. "Words of life" proceeded from them.² Grace was poured into them.³

¹ "The sweetness of the lips increaseth learning" (Prov. xvi. 21). "Whom shall he teach knowledge? and whom shall he make to understand doctrine? them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts. For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, there a little" (Isa. xxviii. 9, 10). The things of God were indeed hid "from the wise and prudent, and revealed unto babes" (Matt. xi. 25).

² "The lips of the wise disperse knowledge" (Prov. xv. 7). "The lips of the righteous feed many" (Prov. x. 21). "The words that I speak unto you are spirit and are life." "Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life" (John vi. 63, 68).

³ "Thou art fairer than the children of men; grace is poured into thy lips: therefore God hath blessed thee for ever" (Ps. xlv. 2). "Every word of God is pure" (Prov. xxx. 5). "The words of the LORD are pure words, as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times." The words of Jesus were truly tried in the hottest furnace of earth, and came out perfectly pure (Ps. xii. 6). "Thy word is very pure: therefore thy servant loveth it" (Ps. cxix. 140).

The heavenly dew of the Spirit rested upon them. Every word was pure, for He whom God sent spoke the words of God (John iii. 34). Even as a child He was filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him (Luke ii. 40). The message borne by this gracious messenger was ever fresh and new; and will be till time shall be no more. A glory greater than that of Solomon clothed His words with majesty and power. His lips were lilies, dropping *sweet-smelling myrrh*. His words were words of spirit and of life. They breathed the character of Jesus; and conveyed the sweetness of "the bundle of myrrh" to those whose spiritual perceptions were quickened by the Spirit. To them they were words of eternal life, bearing the fragrance of heaven to their weary souls; and giving them a foretaste of, and a longing for, the better country. Even the enemies of Jesus were forced to wonder whence had this man this wisdom, and to confess that "never man spake like this man" (John vii. 46).

Ver. 14. *His hands gold rings set with the beryl;*

The hands which made the heavens with all their host, the earth and all things therein,¹ are here represented as gold rings set with the beryl. As by means of the gold rings the vessels of the sanctuary were borne

¹ "Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens, the work of thy hands" (Ps. cii. 25). "When I consider the heavens, the work of thy fingers; the moon and the stars which thou hast ordained; what is man that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?" (Ps. viii. 3, 4.) God "hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds" (Heb. i. 1, 2). "By him (the Son) were all things created" (Col. i. 16).

through the wilderness,¹ so the loving hands of Jesus bear His people to their home, and uphold them on their journey thither. On earth the hands of Jesus were pierced and nailed to the cross, apparently powerless to save either Himself or those suffering with Him.² How often those hands had been raised to bless, and laid on the diseased, the sightless, the deaf, the dead, few appeared to remember then! But the Bride, the Church of God, can never forget that He willingly became powerless, in order that He might bear her in His arms and carry her in His bosom.

The gold rings are set with the beryl. In the vision seen by Daniel the body of Christ was like the beryl: "As I was by the side of the great river, which is Hiddekel; then I lifted up mine eyes, and looked, and behold a certain man clothed in linen, whose loins were girded with the fine gold of Uphaz: his body also

¹ "And thou shalt cast four rings of gold for it, and put them in the four corners thereof; and two rings shall be in the one side of it, and two rings in the other side of it. And thou shalt make staves of shittim-wood, and overlay them with gold. And thou shalt put the staves into the rings by the sides of the ark, that the ark may be borne with them. *The staves shall be in the rings of the ark; they shall not be taken from it*" (Exod. xxv. 12-15). "And thou shalt make for it (the table) four rings of gold, and put the rings in the four corners that are on the four feet thereof. Over against the border shall the rings be for places of the staves to bear the table. And thou shalt make the staves of shittim-wood, and overlay them with gold, that the table may be borne with them" (Exod. xxv. 26-28). "And two golden rings shalt thou make to it under the crown of it, by the two corners thereof, upon the two sides of it shalt thou make it; and they shall be for places for the staves to bear it withal" (Exod. xxx. 4). In the fourth chapter of Numbers we have an account of how the vessels of the sanctuary were to be covered and carried through the wilderness.

² "They pierced my hands and my feet" (Ps. xxii. 16). "Behold my hands and my feet" (Luke xxiv. 39). "He saith to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands" (John xx. 27).

like the beryl, and his eyes as lamps of fire, and his feet like in colour to polished brass, and the voice of his words like the voice of a multitude" (Dan. x. 4-6). The mystical body of Christ, "his church, the fulness of him that filleth all in all" (Eph. i. 22, 23), is kept and upheld by Him. His people are graven on the palms of His hands. His promise is, "Even to old age I am he, and to hoar hairs will I carry you; I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you" (Isa. xli. 4). As with the Church of old, so now—"In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them: and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old" (Isa. lxiii. 9). "Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness" (Isa. xli. 10). Who can tear from *His* hands, or separate from *His* love? "I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. viii. 38, 39). "My sheep shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father which gave them me is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand" (John x. 28, 29).

How blessed are those who are thus "kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation"!

The Psalmist prayed, and many a Christian makes that prayer his own, "Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe." Here we have the Church with the eye of faith

beholding the answer to the oft-pleaded petition. In the gold rings set with the beryl she sees the eternal God her refuge, and underneath the everlasting arms (Deut. xxxiii. 27).

How feeble the grasp of man, how cold the clasp of earthly friends, compared to this eternal embrace! Death cannot loosen His hold: "Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end" (John xiii. 1). When seen by John in the Revelation, He was standing in the midst of the seven churches, and holding in his right hand the seven stars, the ministering spirits of these churches (Rev. i. 16).

His belly bright ivory, overlaid sapphires:

In the Old Testament the belly is frequently spoken of as the seat of the feelings, thoughts, and affections. Thus in Proverbs xx. 27 we read, "The spirit of man is the candle of the LORD, searching all the inward parts of the belly." Again, "The words of a tale-bearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly" (Prov. xviii. 8; xxvi. 22). "The blueness of a wound cleanseth away evil; so do stripes the inward parts of the belly" (Prov. xx. 30). In Psalm xliv. 25 David laments, "Our soul is bowed down to the dust, our belly cleaveth unto the earth."

In one place in the New Testament it has a similar meaning: "Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water" (John vii. 37, 38).

His belly is *bright ivory*. There seems to be an allusion to the great throne of ivory which Solomon (the kingly type of Christ) made, and of which there was not

the like in any kingdom.¹ This throne might have symbolized the great white throne of Revelation: "And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them" (Rev. xx. 11). As seen by the Bride, it is *overlaid with sapphires*.

When Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders, beheld the God of Israel, there was under His feet as it were a paved work of a sapphire stone.² Again, in Ezekiel's vision, the prophet saw above the firmament that was over the heads of the cherubim, "the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone" (Ezek. i. 26). In one case the sapphires formed *the footstool* of the God of Israel. In the other (and that was the *prophet's* vision), they formed *his throne*. Whence do these sapphires come?

"As for the earth, out of it cometh bread; and under it is turned up as it were fire. *The stones of it are the place of sapphires*; and it hath dust of gold"³ (Job

¹ "Moreover the king made a great throne of ivory, and overlaid it with the best gold. The throne had six steps, and the top of the throne was round behind; and there were stays on either side on the place of the seat, and two lions stood beside the stays. And twelve lions stood there on the one side and on the other upon the six steps; there was not the like made in any kingdom" (1 Kings x. 18-20).

² "Then went up Moses, and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel; and they saw the God of Israel: and under his feet as it were a paved work of a sapphire stone, and as it were the body of heaven in clearness" (Exod. xxiv. 9, 10). This was the footstool; but Ezekiel foresaw the footstool raised to become a throne: "Above the firmament that was over their heads (the heads of the cherubim) was the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone; and upon the likeness of the throne the appearance of a man above upon it" (Ezek. i. 26).

³ In a preceding verse we read, "He setteth an end to darkness, and searcheth out all perfection: *the stones of darkness and the shadow of death.*" *From these stones of darkness the sapphires are*

xxviii. 5, 6). These sapphires then come from the earth, and are sought out, and fitted to overlay the throne of bright ivory. The *polishing* of the sapphire seems to have been a work of art, on which much labour and care must have been bestowed. Jeremiah, lamenting over the fall of Israel, says, "Her Nazarites were purer than snow, they were whiter than milk, they were more ruddy in body than rubies, *their polishing was of sapphire*" (Lam. iv. 7). The sapphire held a place in the breastplate of the High Priest, and in the foundations of the heavenly Jerusalem.¹ In the one, they rested in the bosom of the Great Mediator, when He entered into the Holy Place not made with hands. *In bearing the judgment, He bore them upon His heart.*² In the other, they form a part of the garniture of the foundations of the holy city; thus glorifying the corner-stone, the foundation-stone, the rock on which the whole Church has been built.

When Ezekiel would express the high place and great privileges the King of Tyre used to enjoy, he says, "Thou wast upon the holy mountain of God; thou hast walked up and down in the midst of *the stones of fire*:" but, he adds, "thou hast sinned: therefore I will

selected. They lay in the shadow of death till brought to light by the Spirit.

¹ "The second row, an emerald, a sapphire, and a diamond" (Exod. xxviii. 18). "The first foundation, jasper; the second, sapphire" (Rev. xxi. 19).

² "And Aaron shall bear the names of the children of Israel in the breastplate of judgment upon his heart, when he goeth in unto the holy place, for a memorial before the LORD continually. And thou shalt put in the breastplate of judgment the Urim and the Thummim; and they shall be *upon Aaron's heart* when he goeth in before the LORD; and Aaron shall bear the judgment of the children of Israel *upon his heart before the LORD continually*" (Exod. xxviii. 29, 30).

cast thee as profane out of the mountain of God, and I will destroy thee, O covering cherub, from the midst of *the stones of fire*" (Ezek. xxviii. 14, 16).

"*His belly bright ivory overlaid with sapphires.*" This throne of bright ivory is the seat of the affections and desires of Jesus. "A glorious high throne from the beginning is the place of our sanctuary" (Jer. xvii. 12). "Thus saith the LORD, The heaven is my throne, and the earth my footstool; where is the house that ye build unto me? and where the place of my rest? For all those hath mine hand made, and all those have been, saith the LORD; but to this will I look, to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word" (Isa. lxvi. 1, 2). "For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones" (Isa. lvii. 15).

When Jehovah prepared the heavens, and appointed the foundations of the earth, then, even then, did Jesus "rejoice in the habitable parts of the earth, and his delights were with the sons of men."¹ "Who is like unto the LORD our God, who dwelleth on high; who humbleth himself to behold the things that are in heaven and in the earth! He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth the needy out of the dunghill; that he may set him with princes, with the princes of his

¹ "When he gave to the sea his decree, that the waters should not pass his commandment; when he appointed the foundations of the earth: Then I was by him, as one brought up with him; and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him; rejoicing in the habitable part of his earth, and my delights were with the sons of men" (Prov. viii. 29-32).

people" (Ps. cxiii. 5-7). "He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dung-hill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory" (1 Sam. ii. 8).

These sapphires (stones of fire) Jesus has searched out, and raised from the depth of degradation, the pit of sin; and as each one is taken out of the earth in which it was sunk, and shown to belong to Christ, there is joy among the angels of God in heaven.¹ What temptations and trials of faith they have to undergo, through what tribulation they must pass, what persecutions they have to encounter ere they are prepared for their final abode! But each trouble has its "need be;" and they are assured that even when passing through the fire their God will be with them, and that all these things are only working together for their good. Oh! the depth of the riches of that grace, which, stooping from heaven to save us (even when we were dead in sins), hath quickened us together with Christ, and raising us up together, hath made us sit together in heavenly places in him!

Professing Christian, are you a stone of fire, a precious, living stone? And if you are, what place do you hold in the breastplate on the heart of Jesus? and in what way are you adorning the foundation of the holy city, the Church of Christ? Are you shining brightly, reflecting the Saviour's likeness on earth, and thus glory-fying His name; or are you grovelling among the things of earth, lying sunk in degradation and sin; still clinging to the clay from which the Saviour descended to raise you, and encumbering yourself with the thick clay from which His Spirit seeks to set you free? Have

¹ "Likewise, I say unto you, There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth" (Luke xv. 10).

you forgotten that Jesus came to deliver you from this present evil world? You cannot serve two masters. You cannot belong to Christ and the world. The sapphires which overlay the bright ivory are *living stones*. "It is a faithful saying, If we be dead with Christ, we shall also live with him: if we suffer, we shall also reign with him:" but it is equally faithful that "if we deny him he will also deny us: if we believe not, yet he abideth faithful; he cannot deny himself" (2 Tim. ii. 11-13). There are many (like the king of Tyre) to all appearance children of God, who yet shall be cast out as profaning the holy place, of whom Jesus will say, "I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity"¹ (Matt. vii. 23).

"To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne" (Rev. iii. 21).

"Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world; and this is the victory that overcometh the world, our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" (1 John v. 4, 5.)

The *footstool* of the God of Israel appeared to Moses paved with *sapphires*: the *throne* as seen by Ezekiel was of *one*. On earth, they appear many; in heaven, *one*. A time is coming when the children of God scattered abroad shall be gathered together *in one* in Christ Jesus.² Not the smallest stone shall be wanting, and

¹ "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you; depart from me, ye that work iniquity."

² "That in the dispensation of the fulness of times, he might

all shall together form one glorious throne, the seat of Christ's affections and desires. "They shall be mine, saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels (my special treasure)" (Mal. iii. 17).

"A man's belly shall be satisfied with the fruit of his mouth; and with the increase of his lips shall he be filled" (Prov. xviii. 20).

"He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied" (Isa. liii. 11).

Ver. 15. *His legs pillars of marble set upon sockets of fine gold;*

By reference to the notes on Canticles iii. 10 it will be seen that a pillar is a witness. The Church itself is spoken of as the pillar and ground (or stay) of the truth; and Paul says of James, Cephas, and John, that they seemed to be pillars, holding the most responsible position in the assembly, and having great influence and weight in its deliberations.¹

The pillar having to uphold and sustain the body requires to be of great strength. Those mentioned here

gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him" (Eph. i. 10). "He prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation; and not for that nation only, but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad" (John xi. 51, 52).

¹ "But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground (stay) of the truth" (1 Tim. iii. 15).

"And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship" (Gal. ii. 9). In Revelation x. 1, John saw a "mighty angel come down from heaven, clothed with a cloud; and a rainbow upon his head, and his face as it were the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire." This seems to have been the Angel of the Covenant, and his feet (the members of his body on earth), pillars, or witnesses, faithful in much tribulation, their faith being tried in the fire.

are of *marble*: stones of unusual size, not rough and shapeless as when taken from the quarry, but polished and cut out, and fitted for the place they are to hold. It is not every stone which will make a pillar.

Neither in the tabernacle nor in the temple were there pillars of marble, but in the court of the garden of the king's palace at Shushan the hangings were fastened to silver rings, and pillars of marble¹ (Esther i. 5, 6). The pillars which bear up the body of Christ are witnesses of the resurrection, men who are crucified with Christ, who "die daily;" of whom Paul wrote, "no man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life" (2 Tim. ii. 4); monuments of Divine grace, "living epistles of Christ," "remembrancers of the LORD," who faithfully watch over the interests of the Church. While on earth they are but of marble, and it behoves them to "look unto the rock whence they are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence they are digged." Their very weight would render a fall most disastrous to themselves; while their position would make it most terrible to others. The broken pillars of Dagon's temple involved multitudes in ruin. *These pillars of marble have no security except their being set in sockets of fine gold.* They need to be fixed firmly in Him who alone is able to keep them from falling; for other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ (1 Cor. iii. 11). Remove the pillars from the sockets of fine gold, and the fall will be great. "Nevertheless, the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his.

¹ "In the court of the garden of the king's palace; where were white, and green, and blue hangings, fastened with cords of fine linen and purple, to silver rings and pillars of marble."

And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity" (2 Tim. ii. 19).

It was specially with reference to the legs of Jesus the prophecy was given respecting the paschal lamb, "*A bone of him shall not be broken*"¹ (Exod. xii. 46 ; John xiii. 33-36).

There always have been two witnesses on earth to testify to the truth of God, and to sustain His Church. They are spoken of under other types in Zechariah and Revelation ; types suited to the characteristics the Spirit designs to exhibit in them. When He would show how continually they are supplied with grace, they are "olive-trees : " when the brightness of their light is to be made manifest, they are candlesticks.² When their strength, durability, firmness, and responsible position are to be exhibited, they are "*pillars of marble.*"

¹ The command was, "Neither shall ye break a bone thereof." John is the only Evangelist who notices the coincidence : "But when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs ; for these things were done that the scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken." The command respecting the lamb is repeated in Numb. ix. 12. David, speaking of "*the righteous,*" says, "*God keepeth all his bones ; not one of them is broken*" (Ps. xxxiv. 20).

² "Behold a candlestick all gold, with a bowl upon the top of it, and his seven lamps thereon, and seven pipes to the seven lamps, which are upon the top thereof ; and two olive-trees by it, one upon the right of the bowl, and the other upon the left thereof. Then answered I, and said unto him, What are these two olive-trees upon the right of the candlestick, and upon the left thereof ? And I answered again, and said unto him, What be these two olive-branches, which through the two golden pipes empty the golden oil out of themselves ? And he answered me and said, Knowest thou not what these be ? And I said, No, my lord. Then said he unto me, These are the two anointed ones, that stand by the Lord of the whole earth" (Christ) (Zech. iv. 2, 3, 11-14). "And I will give power unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and three score days, clothed in sackcloth. These are the two olive-trees, and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth" (Rev. xi. 3, 4).

In the porch of Solomon's temple were two pillars of brass. "He set up the pillars in the porch of the temple; and he set up the right pillar, and called the name thereof Jachin (he shall establish); and he set up the left pillar, and called the name thereof Boaz (in it is strength)" (1 Kings vii. 21). These pillars were afterwards carried to Babylon.¹ But in the spiritual temple, the pillars of marble *set upon sockets of fine gold* cannot be removed: "Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God; and *he shall go no more out*: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and my new name" (Rev. iii. 12). How beautifully this compares and contrasts with the pillars of the earthly temple!

His countenance as Lebanon, excellent as the cedars:

The countenance of Jesus (in which is life, and by which His people are made exceeding glad)² is compared to Lebanon; that glorious mountain which Moses longed to see, and which from a distance he was allowed to behold before death³—the everlasting hills of Jacob's

¹ "And the pillars of brass that were in the house of the Lord . . . did the Chaldees break in pieces, and carried the brass of them to Babylon" (2 Kings xxv. 13).

² "In the light of the king's countenance is life" (Prov. xvi. 15). "Thou hast made him (the king) most blessed for ever: thou hast made *him* exceeding glad with thy countenance" (Ps. xxi. 6), and through Him all His people.

³ "I pray thee, let me go over, and see the good land that is beyond Jordan, that goodly mountain, and Lebanon" (Deut. iii. 25). "And Moses went up from the plains of Moab unto the mountain of Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, that is over against Jericho." "And the Lord said unto him, This is the land which I swore unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, saying, I will give it unto thy seed: I have caused thee to see it with thine eyes, but thou shalt not go over thither" (Deut. xxxiv. 1-4).

prophecy, unto the utmost bounds of which His blessing extended.¹ Who can bound the riches of Christ, or limit the blessings which His favour bestows upon His people? "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly things in Christ" (Eph. i. 3). "Who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us" (Eph. iii. 20). What depth of love is poured forth in the blessing which the LORD Himself commanded for the children of Israel: "The LORD bless thee, and keep thee: the LORD make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: the LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace" (Numb. vi. 24-26). His countenance is as Lebanon—majestic, noble, looking down on the earthly Canaan with its many inhabitants, and that before the children of Israel were brought in; when its people were dead in sin, and the cry of their iniquity was heard calling to God for vengeance: "The face of the LORD is against them that do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth" (Ps. xxxiv. 16).

This Lebanon bounded the possessions of the children of Israel. *Beyond it they had nothing, either in possession or promise.*² Well may it symbolize the countenance of Jesus, out of whom we can expect nothing, and in whom we have everything.

¹ "The blessings of thy father have prevailed above the blessings of thy progenitors, unto the utmost bound of the everlasting hills: they shall be on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of him that was separate from his brethren" (Gen. xlix. 26).

² "Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you, as I said unto Moses. From the wilderness and this Lebanon, even unto the great river, the river Euphrates" (Josh. i. 4).

As Lebanon appeared to the worn-out wanderers in the wilderness—its base resting on earth, its head raised to heaven—it seemed to guard and keep possession for them of the land of peace and plenty, the promised land. To them it must have appeared *exceedingly beautiful*. Is this the world's estimate of Jesus? Does it see in Him the guardian of all its hopes? Does it consider His favour life, His countenance exceeding noble? While on earth His visage was so marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men. Because He had no form nor comeliness, and no beauty that we should desire him, therefore He was despised and rejected of men. During His sojourn in the world but three disciples were permitted to see Him as He is. On the Mount of Transfiguration, as He prayed, the fashion of His countenance was altered, and *His face did shine as the sun*.¹ Afterwards one of these favoured men, being in the Spirit, beheld *this same Jesus*; “and *his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength*” (Rev. i. 16). To the Church of Christ the marred visage speaks of His deep unutterable love, for she knows that it was for her sake He laid aside His glory, and took upon Him the form without beauty or comeliness.

She speaks of His countenance as “*excellent as the cedars*.” The cedars of Lebanon are always represented in Scripture as excelling all other trees. They are trees of the LORD, which He hath planted, full of sap, affording shelter and rest to many birds. They are rooted in Lebanon; tall, goodly, choice.² The righteous are

¹ The Transfiguration is recorded Luke ix. 29, Matt. xvii. 2, Mark ix. 2.

² “The trees of the LORD are full of sap: the cedars of Lebanon

compared to them by David: "The righteous shall flourish like the palm-tree; he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Those that be planted in the house of the LORD shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing" (Ps. xcii. 12-14).

People of God, is this your character? Do you set forth the excellency of Jesus? Does the world know by your appearance and conduct how good a thing it is to be planted in the house of the LORD? Are you rooted in Christ? And if so, are you *flourishing* in the courts of our God? or are you *stunted, withered, apparently dead*? There are some of whom it is said, they are "trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots" (Jude 12). If you be indeed "Trees of righteousness, The planting of the LORD," why do you not glorify Him? Why are you not growing heaven-ward? Why are you not spreading all around you the influence of His love? You need to live very close to God; you must seek day by day fresh life and strength from Jesus!

"His countenance as Lebanon, excellent as the cedars." What think ye of Christ? Can you perceive this glory, this excellency? All must do so some time; but then it may be too late! Are your minds blinded by the God of this world?

The ministration of death written and engraven on stones was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not steadfastly behold the glory of Moses' countenance. This glory has passed away, but an everlasting glory

which he hath planted; where the birds make their nests" (Ps. civ. 16, 17). "Yet destroyed I the Amorite before them, whose height was like the height of the cedars" (Amos ii. 9).

has succeeded. "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. iv. 6).

How gracious is that Saviour who has made His glory to consist in the salvation of sinners and their sanctification; even as the glory of Lebanon consisted in the excellency of its cedars. "Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound: they shall walk, O LORD, in the light of thy countenance" (Ps. lxxxix. 15).

Ver. 16. *His mouth¹ most sweet; yea, he is altogether lovely. This is my beloved, and this my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem.*

How sweet His words have been at all times to His people! One sorely tried has left this testimony: "I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food" (Job xxiii. 12). Another, who suffered great persecution, and whose heart grieved for the sins of his nation, and the terrible afflictions which he foresaw would overtake it, exclaimed, "Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart" (Jer. xv. 16). A third esteemed it good to have been afflicted, that he might learn God's statutes, and added, "The law of thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver" (Ps. cxix. 72).

Solomon declares the words of a wise man to be gracious;¹ and to Jesus was given "the tongue of the learned, that he should know how to speak a word in season to the weary" (Isa. l. 4). "All bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded

¹ "The words of a wise man's mouth are gracious" (Eccl. x. 12).

out of his mouth" (Luke iv. 22). How sweet to the mothers in Israel the words, "Suffer the little children to come unto me:" to the worn-out worker, the invitation, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest:" to the sin-burdened, "Your sins are forgiven you, go in peace"! To the blind, the lame, the dumb, the sick—how sweet the words which brought light and strength, and speech and health! Even the deaf had ears for His voice; and it aroused the dead. How sweet above all were the dying words of Jesus, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." And we have these words recorded for *our* instruction and comfort. Their sweetness wears not away with the lapse of time! Sweet and fresh and life-giving they are now as ever—promises of present help and future glory, and sealed with this imperishable assurance, "*The mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.*" "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear!"

Not only are His words sweet, but His whole being is incomparably beautiful. "*Yea, he is altogether lovely.*" There is no inconsistency in His character; not the smallest spot upon which Satan can lay his finger, and say, "This is of me." Examine closely every deed, every word, and confess the Spirit of God could alone have delineated such a perfect being, perfect in Himself, and perfect as a Saviour.

The Bride exclaims, "*This is my beloved.*" How proud she feels of Him! Do we feel this holy pride? When Jesus is glorified, do our hearts burn within us? Can we from the heart say, "*This is my beloved*"?—not a being of our own imagination, but *This*: this God-man who hates sin, and who has made atonement for sin: who intercedes for His people that they may

be kept from sin; and who upholds them lest they should fall into sin: who considers Himself glorified in His people's sanctification, and who has left precept upon precept, in order to guard them from sin. "This is my beloved, and this *my friend*, O daughters of Jerusalem." The King is her friend,¹ and "a friend that sticketh closer than a brother" (Prov. xviii. 24). She knows that He loveth at all times,² even when He appears to have left her. While on earth, He was accused of being the friend of sinners, and she was content to take her place among them, and claim His friendship. In doing this, she has relinquished the world, "for the friendship of the world is enmity with God" (James iv. 4); and in acknowledging Christ as her friend, she has confessed her obligation to take His word as her law; for those only are His friends who do whatsoever He commands (John xv. 14).

If the daughters of Jérusalem be those not yet freed from the spirit of bondage, which still enslaves the children of "the Jerusalem which now is," how beautifully does the answer of the Bride appeal to them to lay aside all trust in their own works, and to take her Beloved as their Saviour. She places before them Jesus of Nazareth and His finished work, to which man can add nothing. She points out the essential Godhead and the perfect manhood of this chiefest among ten thousand. She speaks of His sufferings and His exaltation—of the eternal safety of those who are one with Him—and closes by exclaiming, "This is

¹ "He that loveth pureness of heart, for the grace of his lips the king shall be his friend" (Prov. xxii. 11).

² "A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity" (Prov. xvii. 17).

my beloved, and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem.”¹

How often are these daughters warned “not to stir up, nor awake” her “love till he please.” How often does the legal spirit, the hankering after self-righteousness, beset and disturb our communion with Christ! As individuals and as a Church, the old longing to have some works of our own for which we can claim merit, is perpetually trying to make itself felt. There should be no dallying with such. Our safety lies in silencing it by pointing to Christ as the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth (Rom. x. 4).

¹ The effect of this “lifting up” of Christ, this making Him known to the daughters of Jerusalem, is shown in the next chapter.

CHAPTER VI.

VER. 1. *Whither is thy beloved gone, O thou fairest among women? whither is thy beloved turned aside? that we may seek him with thee.*

“**W**HITHER is thy beloved gone?” Well might this question be asked now.

Where is Jesus? His people’s conduct testifies but little to His presence in their midst. Here and there one starts up, who seems to live in the very presence of God, and where such an one dwells, he exhibits Christ with such beauty and attractiveness, that many (hitherto little more than nominal followers of Jesus) are inclined to say, “We will go with thee, and take thy Saviour as our king.”

Oh that the life of Christ were thus manifested in every Christian! Then might we look for the time spoken of by the prophets: “Thus saith the LORD of hosts, It shall yet come to pass, that there shall come people, and the inhabitants of many cities: and the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, Let us go speedily to pray before the LORD, and to seek the LORD of hosts; I will go also. Yea, many people and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the LORD. Thus saith

the LORD of hosts, In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold, out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew,¹ saying, We will go with you ; for we have heard that God is with you" (Zech. viii. 20-23).

In those days, and in that time, saith the LORD, the children of Israel shall come, they and the children of Judah together, going and weeping ; they shall go and seek the LORD their God. They shall ask the way to Zion *with their faces thitherward*, saying, Come, and let us join ourselves to the LORD in a perpetual covenant *that shall not be forgotten*" (Jer. l. 4, 5).

The daughters of Jerusalem call the Bride, "fairest among women." Her beauty is but the reflection of Christ's. She has beheld as in a glass His glory, and is changed into the same image, as by the Spirit of the Lord (2 Cor. iii. 18). They ask her, "Whither is her beloved turned aside?" And is the hope of Israel indeed turned aside as a wayfaring man?² When we have turned from Him, we complain that He has turned aside ! There is nothing for the soul but a constant close walking with God, and a jealous guarding against everything which would tend to draw us from Him. This question is not without purpose. They ask her "Whither is thy beloved turned aside, *that we may seek him with thee?*" The grace of God has overruled her fall, and subsequent contrition, to making these

¹ "He is not a Jew, which is one outwardly ; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh : but he is a Jew, which is one inwardly ; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, not in the letter ; whose praise is not of men but of God" (Rom. ii. 28, 29).

² "O the hope of Israel, the Saviour thereof in time of trouble, why shouldest thou be as a stranger in the land, and as a wayfaring man that turneth aside to tarry for a night?" (Jer. xiv. 8.)

daughters desire closer communion with Christ; even as this same grace has caused the fall of the Jews to result in the calling in of the Gentiles.¹ It is by proclaiming Christ, and faithfully exhibiting His character and work, that she has led them to desire Him. "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me" (John xii. 32). Christ is not lifted up and manifested in the Church as He ought to be, and as He yet will be; or the world would see more leaving her ranks and uniting with the people of God.

Ver. 2. *My beloved is gone down into his garden, to the beds of spices, to feed in the gardens, and to gather lilies.*

The Bride knows *now* where the King is to be found. He is in His garden, which indeed *He had never left*. There she had in vain sought him a short time since, *but then her eyes were holden*. It is in His garden He dwells; it is the place where He loves to dwell. He has bought it, and reclaimed it, and fenced it in, and watered, and cared it. Each plant in it He has planted with His own hands; each flower and fruit owes its beauty and value to His unceasing care. If He were not there, Paul might plant, and Apollos might water, but their labour would be vain. "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the age!" But in all the garden, there is *one spot* where He is sure to be found :

¹ "Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy. Now, if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles, how much more their fulness? For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?" (Rom. xi. 11, 12, 15.)

"*the beds of spices,*" where prayer ascends like incense. Even though but two or three are gathered together, there is He in the midst (Matt. xviii. 20). How glorious will be the time when these beds of spices will send a sweet savour from the whole earth! "For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same, my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense offered unto my name, and a pure offering; for my name shall be great among the heathen, saith the LORD of hosts" (Mal. i. 11).

It is not a mere transient visit Jesus pays. He has come "*to feed in his gardens.*" He is making His abode with His praying people. They have opened their hearts to Him, and He has come to sup with them,¹ to rejoice their hearts, to give them foretastes of future bliss. But he has come also "*to gather lilies.*" "The righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart: and merciful men are taken away, none considering that the righteous is taken away from that which is evil" (Isa. lvii. 1). It is the lilies Jesus gathers, and He comes down for that special purpose to gather them. The lilies which owe their growth in grace, and beauty of holiness, not to their own labour, but to the love of God in Christ; who are clothed with a perfect, unsullied righteousness, for which they toiled not, but which they received through the undeserved mercy of their Saviour: the lilies who are conformed to the likeness of Him, who calls Himself the lily of the valley—these lilies He with His own hand (the nail-marked

¹ "If a man love me, he will keep my words; and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and *make our abode with him*" (John xiv. 23). "If any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me" (Rev. iii. 20).

hand) gathers,¹ and places in His bosom. Hereafter how high the position they hold in heavenly places! John saw them standing on the sea of glass, having the harps of God, and singing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb. "They had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name" (Rev. xv. 2, 3).

To the Christian there is no such thing as death, least of all *untimely death*. Jesus has abolished death; and the *shadow* of death is all the believer has to pass through. We call it death when a child of God passes into a higher state of being. Faith calls it the gathering of lilies. Jesus is the gatherer, and He makes no mistake as He plucks one and passes by another. Some are taken, whose spiritual life is but just begun. These are the lilies in bud. Would it not be better to wait a while, and let them on earth glorify God with powers so lately consecrated to His service? But no! Jesus wants them, and He gathers them. With others the flower has begun to open; their loveliness is developing itself daily. Just as their Christian character has become evident and full of promise, they are taken: why we know not, but Jesus knows. He wants them, and He gathers them. Others have long glorified their Saviour by a Christian course. Their patient continuance in well-doing, their earnest faith, the beauty of their holiness, attract every eye. Often when the outward man is perishing, the inner man, being renewed day by day, brings more glory to God than when the

¹ "He shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom." What the Shepherd does with the lambs, the King does with the lilies in His garden.

faculties were clearer, and youth and intellect formed a portion of his talents. These are lilies fully blown. Jesus wants them, and He gathers them! They are not plucked too rudely—for it is His hand does it. Even though the stroke seem sudden, and it is the desire of our eyes which is taken away, grudge not these lilies to the Master. They are His.

Ver. 3. *I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine; he feedeth among the lilies.*

The Church belongs to Christ, and Christ to the Church. What can come between them? Not death—for when He gathers the lilies, *it is to place them in His bosom*; and with each member of the Church, to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. Not life—for “*He feedeth among the lilies* even now.” It is not *future*; it is *present* bliss of which she speaks. It was Jesus’ meat and drink to do the will of His Father; and she has imbibed this blessed spirit; and now He fulfils His promise, and comes and sups with her, and causes her to sup with Him. It is when she gives herself wholly to the Lord, being completely crucified with Him, and having no will but His, that He takes up His abode with her, and this heavenly feast (foretaste of the marriage-supper above) is begun. “For since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside thee, what he hath prepared for him that waiteth for him” (Isa. lxiv. 4). If to do the will of God were indeed our meat and drink, how Jesus would come and sup with us; what peace and joy we should have, what revelations of unspeakable love! Then indeed

might we exclaim from the depths of the heart, "*I am my beloved's, and my beloved mine.*"

Ver. 4. *Thou art beautiful, O my love, as Tirzah ; comely as Jerusalem ; terrible as with banners.*

This is what the King says of her. She is beautiful : exceeding beautiful. Her renown had gone forth among the heathen for her beauty, for it was perfect through the comeliness of the Lord God, which He had put upon her (Ezek. xvi. 13, 14). Tirzah was the residence of the kings of Israel.¹ The beauty of the Church is such as becomes the residence of the King of kings, the place where His honour dwelleth. It is the beauty of *holiness*, for holiness becometh His house for ever. The beauty of the Lord her God is upon her ; for in her Christ not only dwells, but reigns.

She is "*comely as Jerusalem.*" How comely was Jerusalem ! beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth (Ps. xlviii. 2). The mountains stood around her, as the LORD around His people. It was built as a city compacted together. Her foundations were in the holy mountains. The LORD Himself desired her for His habitation. He loved her gates more than all the dwellings of Jacob. He chose her for His rest for ever. Here he would dwell.²

¹ "When Baasha heard thereof (of Benhadad attacking the cities of Israel), he left off building of Ramah, and dwelt in Tirzah." "In the third year of Asa king of Judah began Baasha the son of Ahijah to reign over *all Israel* in Tirzah." "In the twenty and sixth year of Asa king of Judah began Elah the son of Baasha to reign over Israel in Tirzah, two years" (1 Kings xv. 21-33 ; xvi. 8).

² "As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the LORD is round about his people, from henceforth even for ever" (Ps. cxxv. 2). "Jerusalem is built as a city that is compact together : whither the tribes go up, the tribes of the LORD, unto the testimony of Israel, to give thanks unto the name of the LORD. For

Her chief glory was the temple, whither the tribes went up, the tribes of the LORD, unto the testimony of Israel, to give thanks unto the name of the LORD. This temple Jehovah had hallowed. There He had put His name for ever. There He had promised that His eye and His heart should be perpetually.¹

Glorious things were spoken of this city of God. How David loved to speak of it, and praise its towers, its bulwarks ! Every stone seemed dear to him ! The beauty of the ancient city dimly typified the exquisite comeliness of the new : whose foundations are apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone. Her walls (great and high) are salvation ;

there are set thrones of judgment, the thrones of the house of David. Pray for the peace of Jerusalem : they shall prosper that love thee. Peace be within thy walls, prosperity within thy palaces. For my brethren and companions' sakes I will now say, Peace be within thee. Because of the house of the LORD our God I will seek thy good" (Ps. cxii. 3-9). "His foundation is in the holy mountains. The LORD loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob. Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God" (Ps. lxxxvii. 1-3). "Walk about Zion, and go round about her : tell the towers thereof. Mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces : that ye may tell to the generation following. For this God is our God for ever and ever ; he will be our guide unto death" (Ps. xlviii. 12-14). "For the LORD hath chosen Zion ; he hath desired it for his habitation. This is my rest for ever ; here will I dwell, for I have desired it" (Ps. cxxxii. 13, 14).

¹ "I have hallowed this house which thou hast built, to put my name there for ever ; and mine eyes and mine heart shall be there perpetually" (1 Kings ix. 3). "And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone ; in whom all the building fitly framed together, groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord ; in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit" (Eph. ii. 20-22). "And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God : and her light like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal ; and had a wall great and high, and had twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names written thereon,

and, from her ever-open gates, praise continually ascends. Each stone is a precious living stone, purchased by the blood, set apart by the Spirit, and compacted by the love of God in Christ, which unites all parts together. Each gate is a pearl, for which the Saviour has given a great price, even His own life. The wall is the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ; and the city is filled with that love which passeth knowledge. The pure gold of its street (like transparent glass) reflects the glory of God, which those within with open unveiled face beholding, are changed into the same image; for "now" indeed "we see through a glass, darkly, but then" (where love is perfect) "face to face; now we

which are of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel : on the east three gates ; on the north three gates ; on the south three gates ; and on the west three gates. And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. And he that talked with me had a golden reed to measure the city, and the gates thereof, and the wall thereof. And the city lieth four-square, and the length is as large as the breadth ; and he measured the city, with the reed, twelve thousand furlongs. The length, and the breadth, and the height of it are equal. And he measured the wall thereof, an hundred and forty-four cubits, *the measure of a man, that is, of the angel.* And the building of the wall of it was jasper ; and the city pure gold, like unto clear glass. And the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones. The first foundation, jasper ; the second, sapphire ; the third, a chalcedony ; the fourth, an emerald ; the fifth, sardonyx ; the sixth, sardius ; the seventh, chrysolite ; the eighth, beryl ; the ninth, a topaz ; the tenth, a chrysoprasus ; the eleventh, a jacinth ; the twelfth, an amethyst. And the twelve gates, twelve pearls ; every several gate was of one pearl ; and the street of the city pure gold, as it were transparent glass. And I saw no temple therein ; for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it. And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it : for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it : and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it. *And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day ; for there shall be no night there.* And they shall bring the glory and honour of the nations into it. And there

know in part, but then shall we know even as also we are known" (1 Cor. xiii. 12). Of all the glories of that city nothing equals this; that there Jesus is seen as He is, and those who see Him are like Him, for the city has the glory of God, and her light is like unto a stone most precious, even that stone rejected by the builders on earth, but chosen of God and precious (the foundation-stone, the tried corner-stone, the head-stone crowned with grace), in whom all the building, fitly framed together, becomes an habitation of God through the Spirit. There man fully *realizes* that "God is love;"—there each redeemed soul is free, with a freedom never

shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life" (Rev. xxi. 10-27). This describes the future of the Bride, the Lamb's wife. "Thou shalt call thy walls Salvation, and *thy gates Praise*" (Isa. lx. 18). The stones are described in 1 Peter ii. 5, 6, and also the foundation-stone on which all are built: "To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious; ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner-stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded. Unto you therefore which believe he is precious; but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner." Each gate is a pearl purchased by Jesus's death. "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant-man, seeking goodly pearls; who when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it" (Matt. xiii. 45, 46). These gates are *praise*. This people Christ has formed for Himself to show forth His praise. "Beloved, now are we the sons of God; and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that *when he shall appear we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is*" (1 John iii. 2). Jesus is the head-stone as well as the corner-stone. He is called a tried stone (Isa. xxviii. 16), and he was tried and proved capable of bearing up the whole building before any of the structure was raised. In Zech. iv. 7 He is called the head-stone: "Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubabel thou shalt become a plain; and he shall bring forth the head stone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace, unto it."

thoroughly attained on earth ;—free from sin, and all its defilements ; free from temptation, from sorrow, care, and anxiety ; free from disease of mind and body ; for the inhabitant shall not say, “ I am sick ; the people that dwell therein are forgiven their iniquity ” (Isa. xxxiii. 24).

It needs the wisdom of God to measure that city, the gates thereof, and the walls thereof ; the length and breadth and height of which are equal. Who can know the love of God, which passeth knowledge ? Who can show forth all His praise ? Who can measure the salvation which extends from heaven to earth, and covers all our sins ?

John says he saw no temple there, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it ; and where Jehovah dwells must be the holiest of all. The sun no more was needed, for the Sun of Righteousness was there : neither the moon, for night had passed away for ever, and the “ Faithful Witness ” (whose light had illumined the world during the night of time) was there, having sealed His testimony with blood.

How wonderful that one page in our Bible should bring the glorious city to our view, and make its heavenly joys seem so very near !

O Bride, wife of the Lamb, how long will it be ere thou make thyself ready ? We need arousing. How unlike is our state to that of *the holy city* ! The contrast is painful and alarming : “ How is the gold become dim ! how is the most fine gold changed ! the stones of the sanctuary are poured out in the top of every street. The precious sons of Zion, comparable to fine gold, how are they esteemed as earthen pitchers, the work of the hands of the potter ! ” (Lam. iv. 1, 2.) The salvation which God appointed for walls and bulwarks is made

by many a refuge *for* sin, instead of a refuge *from* sin. We might exclaim with the prophet, "How is the faithful city become an harlot! it was full of judgment; righteousness lodged in it, but now murderers. Thy silver is become dross, thy wine mixed with water: thy princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves: every one loveth gifts, and followeth after rewards: they judge not the fatherless, neither doth the cause of the widow come unto them" (Isa. i. 21-23). She is trimming her ways to seek love, and saying she has not sinned,¹ conforming to the world; mingling with the heathen and learning their works; trifling with, or even cherishing the sins which crucified her Lord. The wall of fire around Zion² should purge her dross, and keep her sons from mingling with those of that other great city Babylon. The command is decided: "Come out, be ye separate, touch no unclean thing," and in the Jerusalem above nothing that defileth can enter: but how few obey the command; and to "touch not, taste not, handle not," is esteemed the rankest bigotry.

Where are the living stones of the city? Are they not lying far apart, scattered, disunited? Where is the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace? Where the

¹ "Why trimmest thou thy way to seek love; therefore hast thou also taught the wicked ones thy ways. Also in thy skirts is found the blood of the souls of the poor innocents: I have not found it by secret search, but upon all these. Yet thou sayest, Because I am innocent, surely his anger shall turn from me: behold, I will plead with thee, because thou sayest, I have not sinned. Why gaddest thou about so much to change thy way? thou also shalt be ashamed of Egypt, as thou wast ashamed of Assyria" (Jer. ii. 33-36). "They did not destroy the nations, concerning whom the LORD commanded them; but were mingled among the heathen, and learned their works" (Ps. cvi. 34, 35).

² "For I, saith the LORD, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of her" (Zech. ii. 5).

love of God shed abroad in the heart? Where the sympathy which causes each member to rejoice or to suffer with the rest? The comeliness of the new Jerusalem is neither sought for nor expected. The chosen Bride—the Lamb's wife—to win whom He came to earth, and suffered, and died, is so taken up with this world, so enamoured of its charms, that she scarcely even thinks of preparing to make herself ready: "O Jerusalem, wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved: how long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee?" (Jer. iv. 14.)

The Church, as seen by the King, is described as not only beautiful and comely, but also as "*terrible*." It is the banners which make her so. They prove that the LORD her God is with her, and the shout of a King in her midst. In the name of her God she sets up her banners, and He makes the fear of her and the dread of her to be upon all nations under the heaven. Following these banners, she may feel confident that no weapon formed against her shall prosper.¹ True, she wrestles "not against flesh and blood, but against prin-

¹ "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. *This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD*; and their righteousness is of me, saith the LORD" (Isa. liv. 17). The children of Israel were told, "Rise ye up, take your journey, and pass over the river Arnon: behold, I have given into thine hand Sihon the Amorite, king of Heshbon, and his land: *begin to possess, and contend with him in battle*. This day will I begin to put the dread of thee and the fear of thee upon the nations under the whole heaven, who shall hear report of thee, and shall tremble, and be in anguish because of thee" (Deut. ii. 24, 25). So when Jacob made his household put away the strange gods, "They journeyed: and the terror of God was upon the cities that were round about them" (Gen. xxxv. 5). So when the children left Egypt, Moses told them beforehand, "Against any of the children of Israel shall not a dog move his tongue, against man or beast" (Exod. xi. 7). .

cialties, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness (wicked spirits) in high places" (Eph. vi. 12). The conflict lies between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. *Each* attribute of Jehovah is a banner which the Church can set up when advancing to resist the assaults of Satan; *and all united, form that banner of love under which she rests.* "The LORD is her banner," and "God is love." *This banner is His gift (for He hath given Jesus, Love incarnate, to the Church),* and it is to be displayed because of the truth. To show forth Christ, to hold Him up so that all may see His beauty, and be conquered to Him, this is the work of the Church.

When the Church has the beauty of Tirzah, and her King reigns in her with full and undivided authority; when she has the comeliness of the new Jerusalem, and each living stone compacted together forms a dwelling-place for the Most High; when the shout of a King is heard in her midst, and she advances in His strength and under His banner to fight every spiritual foe: *then* Satan may tremble, and feel that he hath but a short time.

But how can the Church be terrible to a world with whom her relations are so intimate and friendly? How can the holy city form a fitting abode for the Most High, while its stones are scattered and sunk in earth? How can the King take up his residence amidst scenes of revelry and crime, such as disgraced the beautiful Tirzah?¹

¹ Elak the son of Baasha reigned over Israel in Tirzah, two years. And his servant Zimri, captain of half his chariots, conspired against him, as he was in Tirzah, drinking himself drunk in the house of Arza, steward of his house in Tirzah. And Zimri went in and smote him, and killed him. Zimri reigned seven days

Ver. 5. *Turn away thine eyes from me, for they have overcome me :*

It is the eyes waiting upon the Lord in humility and earnestness, and ever looking unto Him alone, which overcome. "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (James v. 16). The Lord graciously allows Himself to be overcome by prayer. His own promise binds Him to it: "Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it" (John xiv. 13, 14). "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you" (John xvi. 23). "And this is the confidence that we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us: and if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him" (1 John v. 14, 15). It was thus Israel, as a prince, had power with God and with men, and prevailed. "Yea, he had power over the angel, and prevailed; he wept, and made supplication unto him" (Hosea xii. 4). It was by persevering unwearied prayer that Amalek was discomfited, and the children of Israel were victorious.¹ The Bible is full of instances

in Tirzah. Omri, "and all Israel with him, besieged Tirzah," and took it. Then Zimri went into the palace of the king's house, and burnt it over him with fire and died. Omri reigned six years in Tirzah. He bought Samaria, and his wicked son Ahab reigned in Samaria (1 Kings xvi. 6-29).

¹ While Joshua commanded Israel's forces against Amalek, Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. "And it came to pass, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed; and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed. But Moses' hands were heavy; and they took a stone, and put it under him, and he sat thereon: and Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands, the one on the one side, and the other on the other side: and his hands

of God's allowing Himself to be overcome by the prayers of His people. Psalms begun in prayer and tears end in praise and rejoicing.

No wonder verses such as these occur repeatedly in Scripture: "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. v. 17). "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you" (Matt. vii. 7). "Men ought always to pray, and not to faint" (Luke xviii. 1). "In everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God" (Phil. iv. 6). O that all the Lord's people would entreat that a spirit of grace and of supplication might be poured upon the Church, that every eye would be directed towards Him; then might the latter-day glories speedily be expected to appear, and the prophecies as to the extension and fulness of Christ's kingdom be fulfilled.

Thy hair as a flock of goats that appear from Gilead:

If the eyes are ever looking unto the Lord, it is in complete submission to His will. The hair (token of her womanly and wife-like subjection to her husband)

were steady until the going down of the sun. And Joshua discomfited Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword" (Exod. xvii. 8-13).

¹ "Every woman that prayeth" (and this is exactly the attitude of the Church in these verses), "or prophesieth with head uncovered, *dishonoureth her head*: for that is even all one as if she were shaven. For if the woman be not covered, let her also be shorn; but if it be a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her be covered. For a man, indeed, ought not to cover his head, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man. For the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man; neither was the man created for the woman, but the woman for the man. For this cause ought the woman to have power on her head, because of the angels (a covering, in sign that she is under the power of her husband). Nevertheless, neither

is therefore noticed, immediately after the King states that her eyes have overcome him. As the woman was created for the man, so is she created for Christ Jesus; and the evidence of her bearing His image is well-pleasing to the King. The goats' hair covered the tabernacle, and veiled its beauties from those outside. The Bride's hair is given her for a covering; and though the world without cannot appreciate her beauty, the Divine Word states that she is "all-glorious within." The locks, which were the Saviour's shame, are her glory. "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth" (Rom. i. 16). "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom (or whereby) the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world" (Gal. vi. 14).

These locks denote *power on her head*, the power of Christ resting upon her; the spirit of glory and of God.¹

It is in Gilead that the flock of the Lord's heritage, which now dwell solitarily in the wood, shall yet feed.² The effusions and ingatherings of Pentecost are but

is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord. For as the woman is of the man, even so the man also by the woman: but all things of God. Judge in yourselves: is it comely that a woman pray unto God uncovered? Doth not even nature itself teach you, that if a man have long hair it is a shame unto him? But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for hair is given her for a covering (or veil)" (1 Cor. xi. 5-15).

¹ "Most gladly, therefore, will I rather glory in my infirmities, *that the power of Christ may rest upon me*" (2 Cor. xii. 9). "If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you" (1 Pet. iv. 14).

² "Feed thy people with thy rod, the flock of thine heritage, which dwell solitarily in the wood, in the midst of Carmel: let them feed in Bashan and Gilead, as in the days of old" (Micah vii. 14).

first-fruits of the multitudes yet to be brought into the Church. When the power of God rested on the Church at that time, thousands were added of such as should be saved: but we have promises that the glories of the latter day shall far exceed those. Thus Isaiah says, "Lift up thine eyes round about, and see: all they gather themselves together, they come to thee: thy sons shall come from far, and thy daughters shall be nursed at thy side. Then thou shalt see, and flow together, and thine heart shall fear, and be enlarged; because the abundance of the sea shall be converted unto thee, the forces of the Gentiles shall come unto thee. The multitude of camels shall cover thee, the dromedaries of Midian and Ephah; all they from Sheba shall come; they shall bring gold and incense. All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered together unto thee, the rams of Nebaioth shall minister unto thee: they shall come up with acceptance on mine altar, and I will glorify the house of my glory. Who are these that fly as a cloud, and as the doves to their windows? Surely the isles shall wait for me, and the ships of Tarshish first, to bring thy sons from far, their silver and their gold with them, unto the name of the LORD thy God, and to the Holy One of Israel, because he hath glorified thee" (Isa. lx. 4-9).

The he-goats precede the flocks, lead the way, and show that there are numbers to follow. Thus Jeremiah calls to the shepherds of Israel, "Remove out of the midst of Babylon, and go forth out of the land of the Chaldeans, and be as the he-goats before the flocks" (Jer. l. 8). It is by a bold separation from the world, a manful taking up of the cross, and turning the back on earth's pleasures and fascinations, that Jesus will be



glorified. When shall these indications of approaching glory appear?

Ver. 6. *Thy teeth as a flock of sheep which go up from the washing, whereof every one beareth twins, and not one barren among them.*

Those who feed on the bread of life, presented to our acceptance in the Word of God, are the flock which the good Shepherd leadeth safely through the wilderness. In olden times "He made his own people to go forth like sheep, and guided them in the wilderness like a flock. And he led them on safely, so that they feared not" (Ps. lxxviii. 52, 53). Then He fed them with manna which they knew not, neither did their fathers know, that He might make them know "that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD" (Deut. viii. 3). They too went up "from the washing." They "were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea" (1 Cor. x. 2). The true members of the Church of Christ, who are fed with the hidden manna, are guided by the Shepherd who gave his life for the flock. They are sanctified by the application of the blood to the hearts and consciences, through the agency of the Holy Spirit; and they are taught of the Spirit to bring every portion of their lives to be examined and judged by the Word. Those who are washed, sanctified, justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God, present their bodies a living sacrifice to Him, and bring forth much fruit to the honour and praise of His name. They are known by their fruits; for having given all diligence to add to their faith virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kind-

ness, and charity, they are neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Pet. i. 5-8). It seems also as if those whose lives are thus sanctified are specially blessed as means of leading others to Christ, and "building up" those who are His. Paul examined each Church by the Word, and when he found any wanting, he yearned over them, as a parent over wayward children. Of the Galatians he said, "My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you" (Gal. iv. 19). Of the Corinthians: "In Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel" (1 Cor. iv. 15). He spoke of Onesimus as his son whom he had begotten in his bonds, and of Timothy as his dearly beloved son. These were the spiritual seed of that faithful servant, who having received life from Jesus, and living by faith continually on Him, had washed his robes and made them white through the blood of the Lamb.

Ver. 7. *As a piece of a pomegranate, thy temples within thy locks.*

But a portion is seen of that fruit of the Spirit, whereby she is sealed unto the day of redemption. There is something to mark her even on earth as the servant of God—the consecration of her powers (in submission to His will and guidance) to His service. As she once yielded her members servants to uncleanness, and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now she yields her members servants to righteousness unto holiness (Rom. vi. 19). The High Priest bore on his forehead the inscription, *Holiness to the Lord*.¹ His people should

¹ "And thou shalt make a plate pure gold, and grave upon it, the engraving of a signet, HOLINESS TO THE LORD. And thou shalt

bear it too. Amongst the promises to the redeemed, not the least precious is this, that even the commonest vessels of mercy shall bear this sanctifying inscription.

It is only under the shadow of the cross (Christ's shame and the Church's glory) that the heavenly fruit of righteousness appears. Elsewhere we look for it in vain. Those only who are justified by faith have peace with God, and bring forth fruit unto holiness. All others are dead, and the motions of sins which are by the law working in their members bring forth fruit *unto death*.²

put it on a blue lace, that it may be upon the mitre, upon the forefront of the mitre it shall be. And it shall be upon Aaron's forehead, that Aaron may bear the iniquity of the holy things, which the children of Israel shall hallow in all their holy gifts; and it shall be always upon his forehead, that they may be accepted before the LORD" (Exod. xxviii. 36-38).

"If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the Master's use, prepared unto every good work" (2 Tim. ii. 21). "In that day shall there be upon the bells (bridles) of the horses, HOLINESS UNTO THE LORD; and the pots in the LORD's house shall be like the bowls before the altar. Yea, every pot in Jerusalem, and in Judah, shall be holiness unto the LORD of hosts" (Zech. xiv. 20, 21).

² It is said of both Jew and Gentile by nature, "The way of peace have they not known" (Rom. iii. 17). Paul says, that "being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. v. 1), and that being made free from sin and become servants to God, we have our fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life (Rom. vi. 22). "Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God. For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death. But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead (*or*, being dead to that) wherein we were held, that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not the oldness of the letter" (Rom. vii. 4-6). After this, how appropriately comes in the observation, "There are threescore queens, and fourscore concubines, and virgins without number."

Ver. 8. *There are threescore queens, and fourscore concubines, and virgins without number.*

How few there are who realize all the privileges with which union with Christ has invested them ; in whom perfect love has cast out fear ; and who serve with that delightful joyous sense of freedom which makes each service pleasure. These walk at liberty, for they *seek* God's precepts.¹ They seem to have all the treasures of the Master's house at command. They live in constant communion with the King.

There are others who, knowing that Christ has bought them, are seeking to serve Him ; yet are constantly harassed with the depressing spirit of legality. They are yet entangled with a yoke of bondage, and often serve rather from a sense of duty than from love. Not being made perfect in love, their fear has somewhat of torment.

But besides the threescore queens and fourscore concubines, are virgins without number. These virgins seem to be "hidden ones," not yet manifested as children of God. They do not take the high place of "queens," who realize their complete freedom in Christ, and who enjoy unrestrained intercourse with their Lord ; nor that more humble one of "concubines," who, though united to Christ, are not yet perfectly freed from the spirit of bondage : rather they are those who seek the society of God's people, yet are not openly identified with them. They shall in due time declare themselves on the Lord's side, be brought in with gladness and rejoicing, and enter into the palace of the King.

¹ "And I will walk at liberty : for I seek thy precepts" (Ps. cxix. 45).

This class is far more numerous than either of the others, as both Scripture and observation testify. God alone knows how many such are in the world. Man cannot number them. We must not judge, nor come to hasty conclusions respecting the people of God. All are not queens, nor yet concubines. Elijah seemed to stand alone, yet there was an Obadiah. Obadiah stood not alone; there were the hidden ones in the cave. The hidden ones were not the only ones: God had reserved to Himself seven thousand men who had not bowed the knee to the image of Baal.¹

"There are threescore queens, and fourscore concubines, and virgins without number." Not all have equal rank or equal privileges. Each member of the body has its own work to do, each child of God has his place and office assigned him. "He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (Eph. iv. 11, 12). We have "gifts differing according to the grace that is given unto us" (Rom. xii. 6). "And God hath set some in the church; first, apostles; secondarily, prophets; thirdly, teachers; after that, miracles; then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues. Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles? have all the gifts of healing? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret? But covet earnestly the best gifts; and yet show I unto a more excellent way" (1 Cor. xii. 28-31).

¹ See 1 Kings xviii. and xix. for the account of these incidents.

Ver. 9. *My dove, my undefiled is one; she the only one of her mother, she the choice of her that bare her: the daughters saw her, and blessed her; the queens and the concubines, and they praised her.*

How beautifully this verse comes in: "There is *one* body, and *one* Spirit, even as ye are called in *one* hope of your calling; *one* Lord, *one* faith, *one* baptism, *one* God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all" (Eph. iv. 4-6).

There are queens, concubines, and virgins; yet the Church is *one*; and this oneness is caused by the Spirit's uniting the various members into one body. It is "the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. iv. 3). Because this unity is the work of the Holy Spirit in the Church, the King in contemplating it (which He does with infinite delight), calls her *His dove*, *His undefiled*. The children of God, now scattered abroad, are beheld as gathered together in one in Christ, and forming an habitation of God through the Spirit. The Church is *one*, "made perfect in one." For this Jesus prayed, for this He died, and thus He presents her to Himself a glorious Church (*His dove*, *His undefiled*). "not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but holy and without blemish" (Eph. v. 27).

She is the one of her mother, Jerusalem which is above: that free city which was typified by Sarah, the mother of the faithful.¹ Many are the children promised

¹ "And God said unto Abraham, As for Sarai thy wife, thou shalt not call her name Sarai, but Sarah (princess' her name. And I will bless her, and give thee a son also of her: yea, I will bless her, and she will be a mother of nations (she shall become nations'; kings of people shall be of her. Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed: and thou shalt call his name Isaac: and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him" (Gen. xvii. 15, 16, 19). "By myself have I sworn, saith

to the new Jerusalem; many as the sand of the sea, and as the stars which cannot be numbered—yet they are seen as *one*. “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. iii. 28). The blessing is promised to *one*; ¹ *and it is only as united*

the LORD, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying *I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore*; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies: and in thy seed (the child of Sarah) shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice” (Gen. xxii. 16-18). “Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear; break forth into singing, and cry aloud, thou that didst not travail with child: for more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife, saith the LORD. Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations: spare not, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes: for thou shalt break forth on the right hand and on the left; and thy seed shall inherit the Gentiles, and make the desolate cities to be inhabited” (Isa. liv. 1-3). “Lift up thine eyes round about, and behold: all these gather themselves together, and come to thee. As I live, saith the Lord, thou shalt surely clothe thee with them all, as with an ornament, and bind them on thee, as a bride doeth. For thy waste and thy desolate places, and the land of thy destruction, shall even now be too narrow by reason of the inhabitants, and they that swallowed thee up shall be far away. The children which thou shalt have, after thou hast lost the other, shall say again in thy ears, The place is too strait for me: give place to me that I may dwell. Then shalt thou say in thine heart, Who hath begotten me these, seeing I have lost my children, and am desolate, a captive, and removing to and fro? and who hath brought up these? Behold, I was left alone; these, where had they been? Thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I will lift up mine hand to the Gentiles, and set up my standard to the people: and they shall bring thy sons in their arms, and thy daughters shall be carried upon their shoulders” (Isa. xlix. 18-22). “Before she travailed, she brought forth; before her pain came, she was delivered of a man-child. Who hath heard such a thing? who hath seen such things? Shall the earth be made to bring forth in one day? shall a nation be born at once? for as soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth her children” (Isa. lxvi. 7, 8).

¹ “Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ” (Gal. iii. 16).

to Christ, and one in Him, that the Church can claim its fulfilment.

She is "the choice" of her that bare her—the "child of promise,"¹ "born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John i. 13); the cause of unutterable joy,² even in heaven. The King prophetically contemplates the manifestation of the children of God, for which all creation groans. He therefore exclaims, "*The daughters saw her, and blessed her.*" They recognise her as "the blessed of the LORD;" and they too bless her.³ "Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also,⁴ and he praiseth her" (Prov. xxxi. 28). Yea, she sees her children's children, and peace upon Israel (Ps. cxxviii. 6). The queens and the concubines praise her: for the reproach is rolled away. The watchmen's unwearying prayer is about to be answered, and heaven-born Jerusalem, "made perfect in one," has become a praise and

¹ "Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise." "Abraham had two sons; the one by a bond-maid, the other by a free woman. But he who was of the bond woman was born after the flesh; but he of the free woman was by promise" (Gal. iv. 28, 22, 23). "If ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal. iii. 29).

² "And Sarah said, *God hath made me to laugh, all that hear will laugh with me*" (Gen. xxi. 6). "Rejoice, thou barren," etc. (Gal. iv. 27; Isa. liv. 1). "Rejoice ye with Jerusalem, and be glad with her, all ye that love her, rejoice for joy with her, all ye that mourn for her" (Isa. lxvi. 10). "There is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth" (Luke xv. 7, 10). "Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ," etc. "Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them" (Rev. xii. 10-12).

³ "And it shall come to pass, that as ye were a curse among the heathen, O house of Judah, and house of Israel, so will I save you, and ye shall be a blessing" (Zech. viii. 12). "Ye are the blessed of the LORD, which made heaven and earth" (Ps. cxv. 15).

⁴ "Thy Maker is thine husband; the LORD of hosts is his name" (Isa. liv. 5).

glory in the earth. Each member sees and rejoices in the beauty of the whole; for the glory is the glory of God, and the praise is due to Him alone. "Rejoice ye with Jerusalem, and be glad with her, all ye that love her: rejoice for joy with her, all ye that mourn for her: that ye may suck, and be satisfied with the breasts of her consolations; that ye may milk out, and be delighted with the abundance of her glory" (Isa. lxvi. 10, 11).

Ver. 10. *Who is she that looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, terrible as with banners?*

Her appearance arouses inquiry! Who is she that looketh forth as the morning? that morning watched for so anxiously by the people of God; when joy cometh, and the night of weeping is for ever past; when God's loving-kindness is fully revealed. It is from the united Church that light breaks forth as the morning, and health springs forth speedily; while her righteousness goes before her, and the glory of the LORD is her reward (Isa. lviii. 8).

This *one*, this dove, this undefiled, this Church, the habitation of God through the Spirit, appears as the dawn, preceding and foretelling the eternal day, heralding the rising of the Sun of Righteousness who shall be as the light of the morning, a morning without clouds.¹ The dove bearing the olive-leaf indicated the approach of a better era—the commencement of a new state of things on a regenerated earth. The Church in this spiritual aspect (as dove, and undefiled, and one) lifts up her face without spot in Christ; forgets her former misery,

¹ "And he shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds" (2 Sam. xxiii. 4). "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning" (Ps. xxx. 5).

or remembers it as waters that pass away : and now her age is clearer than the noon-day ; she shines forth, she is as the morning.¹ "*Fair as the moon.*" She witnessed faithfully (like her Master) all through the night of time, and sought ever the deliverance of souls. While men slept, or rioted, she continued steadily her heavenly course ; shining amid the darkness of earth with a light fair and beautiful, because the reflection of Him who is "the light of the world."²

Time would fail to tell of all the precious things put forth by this faithful witness :³ spoilings of goods, reproaches and afflictions borne cheerfully for Jesus' sake, marks of being crucified with Him ; deaths of saints, very precious in His sight ; tears, groans, and sighs ;

¹ "If iniquity be in thine hand, put it far away, and let not wickedness dwell in thy tabernacles. For then shalt thou lift up thy face without spot ; yea, thou shalt be steadfast, and shalt not fear : because thou shalt forget thy misery, and remember it as waters that pass away : and thine age shall be clearer than the noon-day ; thou shalt shine forth, thou shalt be as the morning" (Job xi. 14-17).

² The moon—"a faithful witness in heaven" (Ps. lxxxix. 37). "A true witness delivereth souls" (Prov. xiv. 25). "They that sleep, sleep in the night ; and they that be drunken, are drunken in the night" (1 Thess. v. 7). "Ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning" (John xv. 27).

³ "And of Joseph he said, Blessed of the LORD be his land, for the precious things of heaven, for the dew, and for the deep that coucheth beneath, and for the precious fruits brought forth by the sun, and for the precious things put forth by the moon" (Deut. xxxiii. 13, 14). "The time would fail me to tell of Gideon, and Barak, and Samson, and Jephthah ; David also, and Samuel, and the prophets : who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again ; and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance ; that they might obtain a better resurrection : and others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover, of bonds and imprisonment : they were

of which all are numbered, and not one forgotten by Him.¹

She is "fair as the moon, and clear as the sun." Whereas she has been forsaken and hated, "a reproach and a taunt, an instruction and an astonishment, unto the nations round about her" (Ezek. v. 15), her God has brought forth her righteousness as the light, and her judgment as the noon-day. Her path has become as the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day. How different from the faint unsteady light she once gave! The Spirit of the Lord has come upon her; the spirit of power, and of love, and of a sound mind;² and now, instead of shrinking from the

stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented (of whom the world was not worthy): they wandered in deserts, and mountains, and dens, and caves of the earth. And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided (foreseen) some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect" (Heb. xi. 32-40). Paul stated that he was crucified with Christ (Gal. ii. 20). "From henceforth let no man trouble me; for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus" (Gal. vi. 17). All these things are noted by God: "Thou tellest my wanderings; put thou my tears into thy bottle: are they not in thy book?" (Ps. lvi. 8.) "Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints" (Ps. cxvi. 15). "He hath looked down from the height of his sanctuary; from heaven did the LORD behold the earth; to hear the groaning of the prisoners, to loose those that are appointed to death" (Ps. cii. 19, 20). "LORD, all my desire is before thee; and my groaning is not hid from thee" (Ps. xxxviii. 9).

¹ "Whereas thou hast been forsaken and hated, so that no man went through thee, I will make thee an eternal excellency, a joy of many generations" (Isa. lx. 15). "Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass: and he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noon-day" (Ps. xxxvii. 5, 6). "The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day" (Prov. iv. 18).

² "For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind" (2 Tim. i. 7).

contest, she goes forth in His might; instead of halting in her course, and trembling at the length and difficulties of the way, she rejoices as a strong man to run a race. Her going forth is from the end of heaven, her circuit unto the ends of it; and there is nothing hid from her all-penetrating, all-pervading love. Her light is perfect, being seven-fold as the light of seven days.¹

O LORD, let all those who love thee be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might!²

She is "*terrible as with banners.*" The Lord's presence in the midst of her has made her terrible. When she is fair as the moon, clear as the sun, *then* she is terrible as with banners. *It was when Jacob put away all the strange gods of his household, and every ornament associated with idolatry, that the terror of God was upon the cities round about them.*³ It was when Israel turned her back upon Egypt, bidding farewell to its slavery

¹ "Their line (rule, direction) is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them hath he set a tabernacle for the sun; which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, and rejoiceth as a strong man to run a race. His going forth is from the end of the heaven, and his circuit unto the ends of it: and *there is nothing hid from the heat thereof*" (Ps. xix. 4-6). "Moreover, the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold as the light of seven days, in the day that the LORD bindeth up the breach of his people, and healeth the stroke of their wound" (Isa. xxx. 26).

² Deborah's song concludes thus: "So let all thine enemies perish, O LORD; but let them that love him be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might" (Judg. v. 31).

³ "Then Jacob said unto his household, and to all that were with him, Put away the strange gods that are among you, and be clean, and change your garments; and let us arise and go up to Bethel. And they gave unto Jacob all the strange gods which were in their hand, and ear-rings which were in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the oak which was by Shechem. And they journeyed; and the terror of God was upon the cities that were round about them. And they did not pursue after the sons of Jacob" (Gen. xxxv. 2-5).

and its carnal allurements, that "not a dog moved his tongue at them."¹ It was when the two kings of the Amorites on the other side Jordan were utterly destroyed, that the terror of God's people fell upon all the heathen nations; so that their hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man because of them; and they acknowledged that the LORD their God was God in heaven above, and in earth beneath.²

Church of God, if you would do valiantly, if you would conquer all the spiritual foes which surround you, if you would make the name of God hallowed on earth as it is in heaven, seek in God's strength to become a united people, "fair as the moon, clear as the sun," and doubt not but He will make you "terrible as with banners."

How often do we hear the question asked (in other words), "Who will bring me into the strong city? who will lead me into Edom?" But how seldom is our faith capable of answering, "Wilt not thou, O God, which hadst cast us off? and thou, O God, which didst not go out with our armies? give us help from trouble; for vain is the help of man. *Through God we shall do*

¹ "But against any of the children of Israel shall not a dog move his tongue against man or beast; that ye may know how that the LORD doth put a difference between the Egyptians and Israel" (Exod. xi. 7).

² "And she (Rahab) said unto the men, I know that the LORD hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you. For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt; and what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites, that were on the other side Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom ye utterly destroyed. And as soon as we had heard, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you: for the LORD your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath" (Josh. ii. 9-11).

valiantly, for he shall tread down our enemies" (Ps. lx. 9-12).

*Ver. 11. I went down into the garden of nuts to see the
fruits of the valley, to see whether the vine flourished,
the pomegranates budded.*

Here we get a glimpse of the source of her strength. It appears she "went down" (the thing is done) into the garden of nuts, for the purpose of examining the state of the fruits; and while thus occupied in the work of the Lord, her soul made her "like the chariots of Ammi-nadib." The time is far spent, the end of all things is at hand: for the season is that of nuts—an autumn fruit. She "went down"—there should be personal examination, no matter how humiliating. "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves" (2 Cor. xiii. 5). She expects to find fruit (fruit of righteousness, to the praise and glory of God), and she seeks in *the valley*, for it is there, with the lowly contrite heart, the Spirit loves to dwell, and it is to Him these fruits owe their existence and their growth. "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble" (James iv. 6). In this "garden" are fruits of every season; fruits of youth, and fruits of age; even as there are "children," and "young men," and "fathers." The vine mentioned here is the "true vine;"¹ and she desires above all things that *it* should flourish,—that the branches should draw continually life, health, and vigour from the root. It is to be feared some will be found withered, leafless, fruitless; a dis-

¹ In opposition to the true vine, Christ, we have the "vine of the earth" (Rev. xiv. 18-20), which hereafter shall be cast into "the wine-press of the wrath of God."

grace to the tree which bears them; fit only to be cut off and cast away.

In the "garden of nuts," the pomegranates are expected to bud—the fruits of the Spirit to appear: and the Bride searches for them diligently; for each fresh young blossom needs tender care, to guard it from the blighting effects of a world lying in wickedness; and it is in the spirit of believing prayer she goes through the garden, committing each and all to the guardianship of the Master. It is His glory she seeks in all she does, and she knows He is glorified by the appearance of much fruit.

Ver. 12. *Or ever I was aware, my soul made me the chariots of Ammi-nadib (or, I knew not, my soul set me on the chariots of my willing people).*

Unknown to herself, while engaged in "the garden of nuts," looking for, and hastening the coming of her Lord, her soul (the breath of God in her)¹ makes her the chariots of Ammi-nadib (kindred of the prince of the people, or, the people that vows).

The spirit of life within her,² raising her above earthly things, brings her into close communion with God; and she is borne upward. The whole Church is

¹ "And the LORD God formed man, dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul" (Gen. ii. 7). In Matt. xvi. 26, soul means life, "What shall a man give in exchange for his soul (or life)?"

² "Thus are the movements of the cherubim described by Ezekiel: "Whithersoever the spirit was to go, they went; thither was their spirit to go; and the wheels were lifted up over against them; for the spirit of the living creature (life) was in the wheels. When those went, these went; and when those stood, these stood; and when those were lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up over against them; for the spirit of the living creature (life) was in the wheels" (Ezek. i. 20, 21).

raised by the united prayers of a willing people, a people who have offered themselves willingly to the LORD, to fight His battles; and who are wholly devoted to Him.¹ It is the day of the LORD's power. He is thus calling together His people for the war. He is about to strike through kings, to wound the heads over many countries; and His Spirit in her is preparing her for the spiritual conflict; by lifting her up from the earth, and raising her to heavenly communion with Himself. It is the whole body is thus raised, for the *one spirit* animates all: "the spirit of life in the wheels."

Ver. 13. *Return, return, O Shulamite; return, return, that we may look upon thee. What will ye see in the Shulamite? As it were the company of two armies (Mahanaïm).*

These seasons are to strengthen for future work. The time for *rest* (final, everlasting rest) is not yet. She must return to earth. Thus from the mount of Transfiguration had the disciples to descend to witness earthly cares and sorrows (the temporary triumphs of Satan), and to hear from the Master's lips the trials which await them.² The Bride is called "Shulamite,"

¹ "Praise ye the LORD for the avenging of Israel, when the people willingly offered themselves. My heart is toward the governors of Israel that offered themselves willingly among the people" (Judg. v. 2, 9). "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power, in the beauties of holiness." "The LORD at thy right hand shall strike through kings in the day of his wrath. He shall judge among the heathen, he shall fill the places with the dead bodies; he shall wound the heads over many countries" (Ps. cx. 3, 5, 6).

² The very day after the Transfiguration (as recorded by Luke), a man of the company brought to Jesus his son (one of the worst cases of demoniacal possession on record), whose unclean spirit had withstood the disciples' attempts to cast him out. While they were wondering at these things, the Saviour made known to them the trials and death which awaited Him.

*daughter of peace. She owes her existence to the peace made between God and man.*¹

But why is she called on, or commanded to return? In order that the world may look upon her, and see in her a reflection of the Master's beauty, an emanation of His love. She must come back to earth, for there is work to be done there; witness to be borne, souls to be won to Christ; souls that He cannot, will not, be without. Every season of transcendent, blissful communion is but to fit us to return to the scene of labour; invigorated, refreshed—with a deeper sense of redeeming love, and more earnest purpose to devote our redeemed lives to Him. And now, "What will ye see in the Shulamite, the daughter of peace, ye who ask her return?" The answer reminds us of the Saviour's words, "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth; I came not to send peace, but a sword" (Matt. x. 34). The daughter of peace has indeed glad tidings to communicate, "peace on earth, goodwill towards men;" but in bearing the message she will have to maintain a ceaseless conflict against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against wicked spirits in the heavenlies. And therefore in the Shulamite returned ye shall see "*as it were the company of two armies*"—one company, yet two armies. The Church fights not alone. "The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them" (Ps. xxxiv. 7). The

¹ "He is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition; having abolished in his flesh the enmity, the law of commandments in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, making peace; and that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity in himself" (Eph. ii. 14-16). "This man shall be the peace" (Mic. v. 5).

Israel of God, when travelling Canaan-ward, are met by the ministering spirits of the great King—the host of God.¹ If our eyes were opened like those of Elisha's servant, how many places would be to us "Mahanaim"!² *One* company: *two* armies. *One*—a wrestling people, weighted with cares and anxieties; often nearly entangled, yet never wholly overcome:³ the other—free from every weight, servants of God who do His pleasure,⁴ great in power and might;⁵ exceeding numerous, twenty thousand, yea thousands, and the LORD among them.⁶

One—weak, yet having a strength made perfect in weakness: *the other*—excelling in strength.

One—striving to keep God's commandments, yet finding within a nature continually rebelling: *the other*—doing His commandments with intense delight, and without the adverse nature within to combat.

¹ "And Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him. And when Jacob saw them, he said, This is God's host: and he called the name of that place Mahanaim (i.e. two hosts)" (Gen. xxxii. 1, 2). "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?" (Heb. i. 14.)

² "His (Elisha's) servant said unto him, Alas, my master! how shall we do? And he answered, Fear not; for they that be with us are more than they that be with them. And Elisha prayed, and said, LORD, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the LORD opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw; and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha" (2 Kings vi. 15-17).

³ "They shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand" (John x. 28).

⁴ "Bless the LORD, ye his angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word. Bless ye the LORD, all his hosts; ministers of his, that do his pleasure" (Ps. ciii. 20, 21).

⁵ "Angels, which are greater in power and might" (2 Pet. ii. 11).

⁶ "The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands (many thousands) of angels; the LORD is among them as in Sinai, in the holy place" (Ps. lxxviii. 17).

One—hearing God's voice in His Word, and applying to Him for power to follow it: *the other*—hearkening to the voice of His Word with ear undulled by sin; quick to discern His will, and never for a moment delaying to follow it.

“Ye are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born, which are written in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel” (Heb. xii. 22-24).

CHAPTER VII.

VER. 1. *How beautiful are thy feet with shoes, O prince's daughter ! the joints of thy thighs like jewels, the work of the hands of a cunning workman :*

THE Church has received a fresh baptism of the Spirit ; and now she is fitted to bring good tidings to those sitting in darkness and the shadow of death ; to publish peace to those to whom the way of peace is not known. Her feet (once swift to shed blood) are not only running the way of God's commandments, but are hastening to bring others into that way, by guiding them to Christ, "the way of holiness."¹

"How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace ;

¹ "Behold upon the mountains the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace !" (Nah. i. 15.) "The way of peace have they not known" (Rom. iii. 17). "Their feet are swift to shed blood" (ver. 15). The contrast between man by nature as shown in Rom. iii., and man renewed as shown in Canticles vii., is very striking.

"I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart" (Ps. cxix. 32).

"And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness ; the unclean shall not pass over it ; but it shall be for those (or, for he with them) : the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err. No lion shall be there, nor ravenous beast shall go up thereon, it shall not be found there : but the redeemed shall walk there" (Isa. xxxv. 8, 9.) Jesus saith, "I am the way, the truth, and the life ; no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John xiv. 6).

that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth" (Isa. lii. 7). "O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain; O thou that tellest good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God!" (Isa. xl. 9, *marginal reading*.)

Beautiful indeed are her feet, when "shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace" (Eph. vi. 15).

It is meet that these tidings should be conveyed by the daughter of "the Prince of Peace," "the travail of *His* soul," the offspring of the peace which cost Him His life.¹ The King's daughter being "all glorious within," her life gives power to her words; the consistency of her conduct recommends the message to those to whom she is sent.

The symmetry of her person is spoken of with admiration. The joints and bands draw nourishment from the head; and thus the whole body being knit together, and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, increaseth with the increase of God.²

¹ "And having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, whether things in earth, or things in heaven. And you, that were sometime alienated, and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present holy, and unblameable, and unproveable in his sight" (Col. i. 20-22.)

² "Speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, Christ: from whom the whole body fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love" (Eph. iv. 15, 16.)

"The Head, from which all the body, by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God" (Col. ii. 19).

But it is *the joints of the thighs* which are specially mentioned here; the place on which the Angel of the Covenant lays His hand, when in wrestling prayer His servant struggles for a blessing.¹ In this sublime and long-continued struggle she sees God "face to face," and receives from His hand a token which will remain with her during the remainder of her pilgrimage. Thus she bears in her body the marks of the Lord Jesus; but when she is weak then she is strong, and most gladly does she glory in infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon her. His strength is perfected in her weakness; and thus He prepares her for her missionary labour, for it is the lame who take the prey.²

These joints of the thighs are *like jewels*, for such evidences of unwearied prayer are in God's sight very precious. He beholds in them "*the work of the hands of a cunning workman*," even of the God-man. The

¹ There seems evident allusion to Jacob's wrestling, in the mention of the joints of the thighs. "Jacob was left *alone*; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day (or, the ascending of the morning). And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with him. And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me. And he said, What is thy name? And he said, Jacob. And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel (a prince of God): for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed. And Jacob asked, and said, Tell, I pray thee, thy name. And he said, Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name? And he blessed him there. And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel (the face of God): for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved. And as he passed over Penuel the sun rose upon him, and he halted upon his thigh. Therefore the children of Israel eat not the sinew which shrank, which is upon the hollow of the thigh, unto this day: because he touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh in the sinew that shrank" (Gen. xxxii. 24-32.)

² "Then is the prey of a great spoil divided; *the lame take the prey*" (Isa. xxxiii. 23).

wisdom of His Spirit devised, and His hand executed the work. The humbling of human pride, the breaking of the stubborn will, the terribly crushing sense of unworthiness and insufficiency, all is His work; and all is needed ere she commences her glorious work of bearing the message of salvation to perishing thousands.

Ver. 2. *Thy navel a round goblet, wanteth not liquor (mixture);*

Herein lies her power. It is the secret place of her strength.¹ It is compared to a round goblet; *a vessel emptied of self, but filled with the Spirit.*² She has put herself in Christ's hands to do with as He sees best. He bestows upon her *abundant* grace; for God "giveth grace to the humble" (James iv. 6). Believing on Jesus, she has come to Him and received from Him the Spirit, according to His own promise, "He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, Out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive)" (John vii. 38, 39).

The liquor with which the round goblet is filled is similar to that poured out on the disciples at Pentecost, when endued with power from on high. The effects will be similar. When filled with the Spirit she will be the means of turning many to righteousness.

¹ It is said of behemoth, "Lo now, his strength is in his loins, and his force in the navel of his belly" (Job xl. 16.) Solomon, in urging his son to "fear the LORD and depart from evil," adds "It shall be health to thy navel, and marrow to thy bones" (Prov. iii. 8).

² "Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit" (Eph. v. 18). "And of his fulness have all we received" (John i. 16).

Thy belly an heap of wheat set about with lilies :

As shown when considering Canticles iv. 14, the belly denotes in Scripture the seat of the affections and desires.

This wheat is the travail of *His* soul, who gave His life for sinners; the produce of that corn of wheat, which having fallen into the ground and died, abode not alone, but brought forth much fruit.¹ It is the garnered treasure of the great Husbandman; sifted grains, of which not even the smallest is permitted to be lost.² This wheat (dear to the Lord of the harvest) is most precious to the Bride, for "every one that loveth him that begat, loveth him also that is begotten of him" (1 John v. 2).

"Be glad, ye children of Zion, and rejoice in the LORD your God : for he hath given you the former rain moderately, and he will cause to come down for you the rain, the former rain, and the latter rain in the first month. And the floors shall be full of wheat, and the fats shall overflow with wine and oil" (Joel iii. 23, 24).

This wheat is set about with lilies. The "lily-work"

¹ "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone : but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit" (John xii. 24). "There shall be an handful of corn in the earth upon the top of the mountains; the fruit thereof shall shake like Lebanon : and they of the city shall flourish like grass of the earth" (Ps. lxxii. 16).

² "Ye are God's husbandry (tillage)" (1 Cor. iii. 9). "And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired you, that he may sift you as wheat : but I have prayed for thee, *that thy faith fail not*" (Luke xxii. 31, 32). It is on account of Christ's intercession that the heap of wheat is guarded by the lilies.

"For, lo, I will sift the house of Israel among all nations, like as corn is sifted in a sieve, yet shall not the least grain fall upon the earth" (Amos ix. 9). True of God's people as well as of literal Israel.

which surrounds the heap of wheat, and keeps it in on all sides, is *faith*, which *does nothing, but simply looks to Christ, and receives from Him the supplies of grace by which it is kept alive*. The redeemed are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation, and thus are preserved from falling (1 Pet. i. 5). Collected into one heap, they bear witness to the love of Christ, and to the faith which keeps them apart from the world, and united into one body in Him.

Ver. 3. *Thy two breasts like two young roes, twins :*

The love which supplies the consolations of the gospel (so exceeding precious, satisfying at all times) is compared to two young roes (*swift and pleasant*), twins (*double*, because secure, certain).¹ The heart of the Bride, being full of love to God and man, she goes forth in the Spirit of Christ; bringing peace and joy to all within reach of her influence.

Ver. 4. *Thy neck as a tower of ivory ;*

Unlike the stretched-forth necks of the daughters of Zion,² and freed from the yoke of bondage which presses on those who seek salvation by the works of the law,³ the neck of the Bride is upright, holding the Head, and uniting the body to it. Therefore it is compared to a

¹ "Let her be as the loving hind and pleasant roe; let her breasts satisfy thee at all times" (Prov. iv. 19). "And for that the dream was doubled unto Pharaoh twice; it is because the thing is established by God, and God will shortly bring it to pass" (Gen. xli. 32).

² "The daughters of Zion are haughty, and walk with stretched-forth necks, and wanton eyes" (Isa. iii. 16).

³ "Why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?" (Acts xv. 10). "Be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage" (Gal. v. 1).

... of the ... that
... Eph.

... of God, en-
... (Prov. iii. 21) :

and how pleasant does she find it to behold the Sun of Righteousness!¹

Her eyes are compared to *the fish-pools in Heshbon*. Her head is waters, her eyes are a fountain of tears, weeping day and night for the slain of the daughter of her people.² Rivers of waters run down her eyes, because men keep not God's law (Ps. cxix. 136).

In the prophecies of Jeremiah and Isaiah, Heshbon is represented as raising her voice in loud lament for the destruction caused by the pride of Moab and the backsliding of Ammon.³

The fish-pools in Heshbon were by the gate of Bath-rabbim (the daughter of a multitude). Like Wisdom, the Bride takes her stand in the gates, the chief place of concourse; and because the multitude will not hear, her soul weeps in secret for their pride; and her eye weeps sore, and runs down with tears.⁴ Seeing with the spiritual discernment Jesus has given her, she feels

and gives him similar advice respecting God's Word, adding, "Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee" (Prov. iv. 25).

¹ "Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun" (Eccles. xi. 7).

² This was the prayer of Jeremiah, "Oh that my head were waters," etc. (Jer. ix. 1.)

³ "And Heshbon shall cry, and Elealeh; their voice shall be heard unto Jahaz" (Isa. xv. 4). "Heshbon was the city of Sihon the king of the Amorites, who had fought against the former king of Moab, and taken all his land out of his hand, even unto Arnon. Wherefore they that speak in proverbs, say, Come into Heshbon, let the city of Sihon be built and prepared: for there is a fire gone out of Heshbon, a flame from the city of Sihon: it hath consumed Ar of Moab, the lords of the high places of Arnon" (Numb. xxi. 26-28). Israel took Heshbon, and it was given to Reuben (Numb. xxxii. 37). Jer. xlviii. and xlix. record the cry of Heshbon.

⁴ Thus Jeremiah laments the obstinate, determined deafness of the children of Israel (Jer. xiii. 17).

(like Him) the deepest grief at the madness of sinners. Her heart yearns over souls, as He yearned over Jerusalem. It is rain from heaven which fills these pools in Heshbon;¹ the Spirit of the compassionate Saviour dwelling in her. But those who sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth, and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall *doubtless* come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him" (Ps. cxxvi. 5, 6). This weeping is but for a night; joy cometh in *that* morning when God shall wipe away all tears from her eyes.²

Thy nose as the tower of Lebanon, which looketh toward Damascus:

The nose indicates the direction in which the countenance is turned. The King's countenance is represented as Lebanon (Cant. v. 15); and He is the head of His Church and Bride. The tower seems to be a watch-tower, "which looketh toward Damascus." Perhaps the Bride is waiting for and expecting the fulfilment of the prophecy, that Damascus shall be "as the glory of the children of Israel."³ It was once Israel's great and powerful enemy, and threshed Gilead with threshing instruments of iron,—Gilead, which God counted specially His own.⁴ Jeremiah foresaw a

¹ "Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee: in whose heart are the ways of them: who passing through the valley of Baca, make it a well: the rain also filleth the pools" (Ps. lxxxiv. 5, 6).

² "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning" (Ps. xxx. 5). "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes" (Rev. xxi. 4).

³ "The fortress also shall cease from Ephraim, and the kingdom from Damascus, and the remnant of Syria: they shall be as the glory of the children of Israel, saith the LORD of hosts" (Isa. xvii. 3).

⁴ "Thus saith the LORD, For three transgressions of Damascus,

time when Damascus should wax feeble and turn to flee.¹

There seems to be on the part of the Bride expectation that from Damascus the cry of anguish may be followed by the breath of prayer, which like sweet incense would ascend, a memorial to the great Head of the Church.²

It was from Damascus the first sound of prayer from the great apostle of the Gentiles entered the ear of Jehovah; and the Lord (smelling a sweet savour) announced to Ananias the wonderful tidings, "Saul of Tarsus prayeth."

The Church should watch day and night for indications such as this, that the enemies of God are becoming reconciled, that hearts are bent, and pride laid low, and prayer and praise are ascending to Jesus, in places where His name used never to be breathed.

Ver. 5. *Thine head upon thee like Carmel (crimson), and the hair of thine head like purple:*

Her head (Christ) upon her, holding His proper place, as sole director and guide of His Church, is compared to Carmel.

It was on Carmel God vindicated the honour of His great name. Here were gathered all Israel, and all the false prophets; and here Jehovah accepted the sacrifice

and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they have threshed Gilead with threshing instruments of iron" (Amos i. 3). "*Gilead is mine*" (Ps. cviii. 8). The "*hill of witness*" may symbolize the witnessing Church set on an hill.

¹ "Damascus is waxed feeble, and turneth herself to flee, and fear hath seized on her: anguish and sorrows have taken her, as a woman in travail" (Jer. xlix. 17).

² "Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense, the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice" (Ps. cxli. 2).

of His servant, and caused the shame and utter destruction of all false prophets.¹ Here the heart of Israel was turned back again to the true and only God. On the top of Carmel (whilst the worldly idolatrous king ate and drank, unmindful of the terrible warning he had just received), God's servant went up, and casting himself down on the earth, put his face between his knees. Then Carmel witnessed such watching and prayer as the Father delights in—the servant watching, while the master prayed; and here prayer was answered, and brought down “showers of blessing” on the dry and thirsting land.²

And thus the great Head of the Church resembles Carmel.

In Christ Jesus, God vindicates the honour of His name. To Him shall be gathered all nations; and in Him the Father will manifest the acceptance of the

¹ “Now therefore send, and gather to me all Israel unto mount Carmel, and the prophets of Baal four hundred and fifty, and the prophets of the groves four hundred, which eat at Jezebel's table.” Ahab having done this, the false prophets accepted the challenge of Elijah, and it was agreed that the God who answered by fire was God. When the powerlessness of Baal and his prophets was proved, Elijah called upon Jehovah, entreating Him to make known that He was God, and Elijah His servant. “Then the fire of the LORD fell, and consumed the burnt-sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces: and they said, The LORD, he is the God; the LORD, he is the God.” (1 Kings xviii.)

² “Ahab went up to eat and to drink. And Elijah went up to the top of Carmel; and he cast himself down upon the earth, and put his face between his knees, and said to his servant, Go up now, look toward the sea. And he went up, and looked, and said, There is nothing. And he said, Go again, seven times. And it came to pass at the seventh time, that he said, Behold, there ariseth a little cloud out of the sea, *like a man's hand*. And he said, Go up, say unto Ahab, Prepare thy chariot, and get thee down, that the rain stop thee not” (1 Kings xviii. 42-44).

one great sacrifice. There shall be seen the destruction of all false prophets; of all who love and make a lie; of all who mingle the worship of Jehovah with the worship of any other.¹

To Christ also the Church ascends, and on Him she rests; pleading for the descent of the former and latter rains, withheld for the sins of the people: and while the world is feasting and enjoying unhallowed mirth, she watches patiently and prays unceasingly, for the appearance of the little cloud, in which she sees the hand of God.

Her head upon her is like Carmel, and the hair of her head (the tokens of Christ's subjection and shame) like *purple*. The shame has passed away, or rather has become His glory. The reproach of Christ is truly greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; but in this view of the Church and the Church's Head the reproach is rolled away for ever. He who, though equal with God, made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, is now highly exalted and given a name which is above every name. To Him every knee bows, and Him every tongue confesses as Lord. "We see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death

¹ "And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him that sat on the horse, and against his army. And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone. And the remnant were slain with the sword of him that sat upon the horse, which sword proceeded out of his mouth; and all the fowls were filled with their flesh" (Rev. xix. 19-21). It is specially in her missionary aspect, the Head of the Church upon her, is like Carmel.

for every man" (Heb. ii. 9). "He hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, King of Kings, and LORD of LORDS" (Rev. xix. 16).

He who suffered and bore the shame, now bears the glory. He wears the crowns, and sits and rules upon His throne.¹ He is (in the view taken in this chapter) reigning over His Church, and in it; and this accounts for her power. With Christ her Head *upon her*, exalted as her King and Ruler, and thoroughly obeyed by her, she may go forth to conquer souls for Him.

The king is held (bound) in the galleries.

The galleries are mentioned by Ezekiel, as "several walks, or walks with pillars."² In these the King is represented in His temple. Thus John beheld Him walking in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks.³ *Though walking He is not moving away: He is held, or bound.*

In these galleries are narrow covered windows, and

¹ "Then take silver and gold, and make crowns, and set them upon the head of Joshua, the son of Josedech, the high priest, and speak unto him, saying, Behold the man whose name is The BRANCH; and he shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the temple of the LORD; even he shall build the temple of the LORD; and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and he shall be a priest upon his throne; and the counsel of peace shall be between them both" (Zech. vi. 11-13).

² "The galleries (several walks, or walks with pillars) thereof on the one side, and on the other side, an hundred cubits, with the inner temple, and the porches of the court; the door-posts, and the narrow windows, and the galleries round about on their three stories, over against the door, ceiled with wood round about, and from the ground up to the windows, and the windows were covered" (Ezek. xli. 15, 16).

³ "And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle" (Rev. i. 13). "Who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks" (Rev. ii. 1).

through them faith catches glimpses of the King, and sees that He is bound.

The windows are *narrow*. Let faith be ever so strong, how narrow are the views she gets of Christ! They are *covered*: hid altogether from those who are lost,¹ and seen through but dimly even by God's own people. "For now we see through a glass, darkly" (1 Cor. xiii. 12). Yet faith rejoices even in these faint glimpses of Christ, and thanks God for the vision He vouchsafes to her in His Word of *the King* "*bound*"—bound by His promises—nothing so binding, for "faithfulness is the girdle of his reins" (Isa. xi. 5).

How full is Scripture of the promises made in Christ! How certain their fulfilment even to the least jot and tittle; for the King is "*bound*" in the galleries! There He lingers listening to the prayers of His people; watching them with loving eyes; counting every sigh; marking every tear. The prayers of His redeemed have held Him there; and He will not, cannot move away, for He, "the Faithful and True," is bound!

Ver. 6. *How fair and how pleasant art thou, O love, for delights!*

When thus fitted for her mission, how glorious she appears; her righteousness going forth as brightness, her salvation as a lamp that burneth (Isa. lxii. 1). The King beholds her with approving love. As a bridegroom rejoiceth over a bride, so her God rejoices over her. He exclaims, "How fair!" (for He has presented her to Himself without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing,) "how pleasant!" (for her members dwell

¹ "But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost" (2 Cor. iv. 3).

together in unity, the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace,) "art thou, O love, for delights!" Reflecting the love incarnate, the King sees in her His own image, His own beauty. Once the image was dim and indistinct; and though the all-seeing eye could detect it, the world could not; and even to herself it seemed that she often reflected more the world's ways and opinions than those of Christ. But now she has drawn closer to Him, and beholding Him more clearly (to the exclusion of all else), she is changed into the same glory as by the Spirit of God.

It seems as if this were the answer to the Saviour's prayer¹ (John xvii.); as if, being now manifestly united in the spirit of love, she is made perfect in one; as if the glory which the Father had put upon the Son, the Son has *manifestly* put upon the Church. As the Father, beholding the Son, exclaimed, "This is my beloved, in whom I am well pleased:" so the Son,

¹ "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth. As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth (truly sanctified). Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one. I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me. Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee: but I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me. And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them" (John xvii. 17-26).

the Bride, exclaims, "How fair and how
O love, for delights!"

*thy stature is like to a palm-tree, and thy
to clusters.*

stature,—*this*, which has just been de-
anxiety to bring others into the way of
she herself treads. This wrestling,
it, which will not be satisfied without the
which enables her to see God face to face.
not gift of God's own Spirit, not for herself
order that souls may be won to Christ.
of her members in one body, kept by that
beautifies, while it separates them from the
these consolations of Christ which abound in
comfort and support of God's people. This
ure and steadfast, which unites her members
ad. This deep, unfeigned sorrow for sin and
over sinners. This watching and waiting for
us of repentance. This firm resting upon Christ
he pleads for the descent of the Spirit on an
ful, rebellious people. This exaltation of Christ
ad over all, her King and Ruler. This joy in
called to partake His sufferings.—*This her stature*
to a palm-tree for height and *uprightness*.¹ No
stooping to conciliate the world, or learn its
; no longer a child, "tossed to and fro, and car-
about with every wind of doctrine;"² no longer
aking as a child, understanding as a child, thinking

"They are upright as the palm-tree" (Jer. x. 5).

"Till we all come in (into) the unity of the faith, and of the
nowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure
the fulness of Christ: that we be no more children, tossed to and
carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of

as a child,—she has put away childish things. She is growing up into Christ in all things ; and, being rooted and grounded in Him, is attaining to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.—Therefore she beareth fruit in old age, and *this fruit crowns her Head with glory.*

She could not have attained to this stature of herself ; for in spiritual, as in physical growth, “which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature ?” But having surrendered herself wholly to Christ, He has made her what she is ; and being such, the consolations of the gospel are with her neither small nor few. Like clusters, wherein is found the new wine containing the blessing,¹ she is made the means of conveying this blessing (the peace and joy of the new covenant in blood) to others.

Ver. 8. *I said, I will go up to the palm-tree, I will take hold of the boughs thereof : now also thy breasts shall be as clusters of the vine, and the smell of thy nose like apples :*

It seems to be the Bride who speaks.

It is remarkable that the children of Israel could not go up to Jericho (the city of palm-trees) till the reproach of Egypt (*i.e.* of its bondage and idolatry) was

men, cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive. But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, Christ” (Eph. iv. 13-16). “When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought (reasoned) as a child ; but when I became a man, I put away childish things” (1 Cor. xiii. 11).

¹ “Thus saith the Lord, As the new wine is found in the cluster, and one saith, Destroy it not, for a blessing is in it : so will I do for my servants’ sakes, that I may not destroy them all” (Isa. lxxv. 8). Wine was made from the fruit of the palm-tree, as well as from that of the vine.

rolled away, which was only when all the people were circumcised.¹

It is after the Church has put away all the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ, after she has cast away all confidence in self, rejoices solely in Christ Jesus, and worships God in the spirit² (in fact, when she is what she is represented in the beginning of this chapter), that the proposal is made to go up to the palm-tree. Then (as to Israel in former times) Christ appears as the Captain of Salvation, ready to lead on to victory.³

In that mysterious description of the temple by Ezekiel (chapters xl. to xlvii.), we read that, upon each

¹ "At that time the LORD said unto Joshua, Make thee sharp knives (knives of flints), and circumcise again (return and circumcise) the children of Israel the second time. And Joshua made him sharp knives, and circumcised the children of Israel at the hill of the foreskins." After explaining how it was that this generation had not been circumcised, the narrative continues, "And the LORD said unto Joshua, This day have I rolled away the reproach of Egypt from off you. Wherefore the name of the place is called Gilgal (rolling) unto this day" (Josh. v. 2, 9). When by Jericho (ver. 13), the LORD appeared as Captain (Prince) of the host; and in the following chapter we read of the miraculous fall of Jericho, *the city of palm-trees*.

² "In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ" (Col. ii. 11). "For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh" (Phil. iii. 3).

³ "And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes, and looked, and, behold, there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand: and Joshua went unto him, and said unto him, Art thou for us, or for our adversaries? And he said, Nay; but as captain (prince) of the host of the LORD am I now come. And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship, and said unto him, What saith my lord unto his servant? And the captain of the LORD's host said unto Joshua, Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy" (Josh. v. 13-15).

post were *palm-trees*.¹ This temple appears to be a symbolic representation of the Church of Christ in its fulness.

The Bride, animated by the presence of her LORD, is ready to go up and take hold of the boughs of the palm-tree. Certain of victory, she already sees herself more than conqueror through Him who loved her. She anticipates the coming of her Lord and King; His triumphant entry into the city which He hath chosen for Himself; and she prepares to welcome Him with cries of Hosanna!²

That coming will be to her a feast of tabernacles—a sabbath in which she will rejoice before the LORD her God.³ The thought fills her soul with gladness. During

¹ It is remarkable how frequently the palm-trees are mentioned as being on the posts; "one on this side, and another on that side." It is even stated that the measure of the palm-trees is "after the measure of the gate that looketh toward the east" (chap. xl. 22). This temple may be one to be built by the Jews restored to Palestine; and not yet open to the fact that the only all-sufficient sacrifice has been made. Like the tabernacle and temple of Solomon, it appears highly symbolical.

² "Much people that were come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, took branches of palm-trees, and went forth to meet him, and cried, Hosanna! Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord" (John xii. 12, 13).

³ "In the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when ye have gathered in the fruit of the land, ye shall keep a feast unto the LORD seven days: on the first day a sabbath, and on the eighth day a sabbath. And ye shall take you on the first day the boughs of goodly trees, branches of palm-trees, and the boughs of thick trees, and willows of the brook; and ye shall rejoice before the LORD your God seven days. And ye shall keep it a feast unto the LORD seven days in the year: a statute for ever in your generations; ye shall celebrate it in the seventh month. Ye shall dwell in booths seven days: all that are Israelites born shall dwell in booths; that your generations may know that I made the children of Israel to dwell in booths, when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I the LORD your God" (Lev. xxiii. 39-43). That this festival pointed to a time

the feast of tabernacles (to which this verse seems to allude) the children of Israel dwelt in booths; and herein is contained a precious truth. In order fully to rejoice in Christ Jesus, and prepare for His coming kingdom, we must realize that this present state is not our rest,—that we are pilgrims and strangers upon earth. The King exclaims, “Now also” (*now*, when she is preparing for victory in the name and strength of the Lord, and her affections are completely loosed from earth), “thy breasts shall be as clusters of the vine,” “the true vine.” As she derives comfort from Christ, so she largely administers these comforts to others. Thus Paul wrote to the Corinthian Church, “Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, *so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ.* And whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer, *or whether we be comforted it is for your consolation and salvation.* And our hope of you is steadfast, knowing that as ye are partakers of the sufferings, *so also of the consolation*” (2 Cor. i. 3-7).

By bringing the knowledge of Jesus to those who were ready to perish, and heavy of heart, she has caused

of great spiritual rejoicing, to be participated in by “whosoever will,” amongst all nations, is evident from Zech. xiv. 16: “It shall come to pass that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem, shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles.”

them to forget their poverty, and remember their misery no more ; and has brought joy and gladness to all who receive her message.¹

She dwells under the shadow of the apple-tree, Christ (Cant. ii. 3) ; and the memory of His love never leaves her.² Wherever she turns she perceives Him. His Spirit brings continually to her remembrance all things whatsoever He has said to her.³ Thus the words of Jesus (the "apples of gold"), whether for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, or for instruction in righteousness, never leave her. These words are in her heart (inscribed there by the Spirit). She teaches them diligently to her children, and talks of them when she sits in her house, when she walks by the way, when she lies down, and when she rises up. She binds them for a sign upon her hand (in all her works they guide her), and they are as frontlets between her eyes. She writes them on the posts of her house, and on her gates.⁴ By

¹ "Wine that maketh glad the heart of man" (Ps. civ. 15). "We also joy in God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement" (Rom. v. 11).

² Smell seems in Scripture to denote "memorial." Thus in Hosea xiv. 7 we read, "They that dwell under his shadow shall return ; they shall revive as the corn, and grow as the vine ; the scent (or memorial) thereof as the wine of Lebanon." The incense offered to God seems to symbolize the memorial of Christ's work, ever reminding the Father of what the Son has done for man.

³ "The Comforter, the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you" (John xiv. 26). The "Acts" show how remarkably this promise was fulfilled to the disciples.

⁴ Thus Jewish parents were exhorted to teach their children (Deut. vi. 6-9). In Ezekiel's temple we have not only palm-trees on the posts, but from the ground unto above the door were cherubim and palm-trees made, and on the wall of the temple. Every cherub had two faces ; so that the face of a man was *toward the palm-tree* on the one side, and the face of a young lion *toward the*

them she has gotten the victory. When she goes, they lead her; when she sleeps, they keep her; and when she awakes, they talk with her (Prov. vi. 22). Thus she walks on her way safely, and her foot doth not stumble. When she lies down she is not afraid; yea, she shall lie down, and her sleep shall be sweet (Prov. iii. 22-24). They are life to her soul, and, having her face set Zionward, she feeds on them continually.

Ver. 9. *And the roof of thy mouth like the best wine for my beloved, that goeth sweetly (straightly), causing the lips of those that are asleep (the ancient) to speak.*

How strongly this contrasts with the pitiful state of Jerusalem, when undergoing chastisement of the Lord for her sins. Then "the tongue of the sucking child cleave to the roof of his mouth for thirst" (Lam. iv. 4). Then young and old were parched, for the Lord had sent a famine on the land;—not merely a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water (though that was literally the case), but of hearing the words of the LORD.¹ Then a restraint was laid upon the word.² The people would not be reprov'd, and the reproofs were hushed; for Ephraim had joined himself to idols, and God let him alone.³

palm-tree on the other side (Ezek. xli. 18-20). In Revelation xii. 11 we are told that the brethren overcame "by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony."

¹ "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land; not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the word of the LORD" (Amos viii. 11). This terrible prediction (so completely fulfilled in later times) was partially fulfilled during the Babylonish captivity.

² "I will make thy tongue cleave to the roof of thy mouth, that thou shalt be dumb, and shalt not be to them a reprover; for they are a rebellious house" (Ezek. iii. 26).

³ "Ephraim is joined to idols; let him alone" (Hos. iv. 17).

Now, what a glorious, gracious change ! The backsliding of Ephraim has been healed. He has cast away his idols.¹ The captivity of Zion is turned. Her mouth is filled with laughter, and her tongue with singing. Even the heathen confess what great things God hath done for her. The LORD hath done great things for her, whereof she is glad.²

The King speaks of the best wine,—the wine of Lebanon ;—*joy from the very presence of Christ.*³ Her heart rejoices and her tongue is glad. He has made her *full of joy with His countenance.*

This best wine is for her beloved—to *glorify Him.* God has been merciful to her, and blessed her, and caused His face to shine on her ; in order that His way may be known upon earth, His saving health among all nations. Her song is ever, "Let the people praise *thee*, O God ; let all the people praise *thee*. O let the nations be glad and sing for joy ; for thou shalt judge the people righteously, and govern the nations upon earth. Let the people praise *thee*, O God ; let all the people praise *thee*. *Then shall the earth yield her increase ; and*

¹ "I will heal their backsliding. . . . Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols ?" (Hos. xiv. 4, 8.)

² "When the LORD turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream. Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing ; then said they among the heathen, The LORD hath done great things for them, the LORD hath done great things for us ; whereof we are glad" (Ps. cxxvi. 1-3).

³ The countenance of Christ is compared to Lebanon (Cant. v. 15). Hosea speaks of the wine of Lebanon (Hos. xiv. 7). "I foresaw the Lord always before my face ; for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved : therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad," etc. "Thou hast made known to me the ways of life ; thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance" (Acts ii. 25-28). This prophecy (applied to the resurrection of the literal body of Jesus) may also be applied to His mystical body, buried with, and raised with, Him.

God, our own God, shall bless us. God shall bless us; and all the ends of the earth shall fear him" (Ps. lxxvii.) This wine goeth sweetly (straightly), direct to the heart: it causeth the lips of those that are asleep to speak. The blood of atonement, which is ever her theme of rejoicing, brings immediate relief and comfort to those who accept it. It goes straight to the heart of the sinner (dead in trespasses and sins), and gives him life. The heart closed to every other message is opened and aroused by this. It is the means God uses to awake the dead.¹ And those who sleep in Jesus, do not they, though dead, speak, and bear witness to the efficacy of the blood? "The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy" (Rev. xix. 10). Scripture abounds with powerful appeals from those gone before, entreating us to accept life through the blood; and clouds of witnesses testify that none ever tasted of that blood and died. Whoever has received it can affirm that it has gone down sweetly, straight to the heart, and caused those who were asleep to speak.

She was once herself sleeping (while the Bridegroom tarried). Dumb with silence, she held her peace even from good: but it is so no longer. Her "heart is inditing of a good matter" (Ps. xlv. 1). The first notes of the marriage hymn are sounded. The glorious days of Pentecost have returned with redoubled power; and the Spirit constrains her to speak with a force and freedom, which causes wonder even to herself. Zechariah's prophecy is fulfilled: "And Ephraim shall

¹ "By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and by it he, being dead, yet speaketh (or is yet spoken of)" (Heb. xi. 4). "The blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel" (Heb. xii. 24).

be like a mighty man, and their heart shall rejoice as through wine: yea, their children shall see, and be glad; their heart shall rejoice in the LORD" (Zech. x. 7).

The Church seems here to attain a fulness of joy, compared to which all previous experiences have been but foretastes. This best wine, which her Lord has provided for the marriage feast, has been kept back till now;¹ and the appointment of love seems about to be kept: "I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom" (Matt. xxvi. 29).

Ver. 10. *I my beloved's, and his desire toward me.*

She is His altogether, having conquered in His strength everything which would keep her from Him. She has given up (forgotten) her own people, and her father's house; so the King greatly desires her beauty, for He is her Lord and Husband.²

"The LORD hath chosen Zion: he hath desired it for his habitation. This is his rest for ever: here will he dwell; for he has desired it" (Ps. cxxxii. 13, 14). "Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready" (Rev. xix. 7).

His desire is toward her. From the beginning the Father's delight was in the Son, and the Son's delights

¹ "Thou hast kept the good wine until now" (John ii. 10).

² "Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people, and thy father's house; so shall the King greatly desire thy beauty; for he is thy Lord; and worship thou him" (Ps. xlv. 10, 11). It is to Rev. xix. this psalm seems to refer. After the announcement, "The marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready" (Rev. xix. 7), "the word" is seen going forth to conquer the nations.

were with the sons of men. He set His love upon them, and chose them, and purchased them for Himself.

The joy set before Him, for which He endured the cross, despising the shame, is now His. The yearning of His heart is at last satisfied. The Church has cast off every weight, every entanglement: and flung herself unreservedly into His loving arms, never more to turn aside. The King joys in the strength of Jehovah (the Triune God), who has put forth all His attributes for the Church's salvation; and in this salvation how greatly does He rejoice! "Thou hast given him his heart's desire, and hast not withholden the request of his lips. Thou hast made him most blessed for ever; thou hast made him exceeding glad with thy countenance" (Ps. xxi. 2-6).

Ver. 11. *Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the field;
let us lodge in the villages.*

It is an invitation—an entreaty: "Let us go forth." She cannot go alone, and He will not go without her. When He says, "Let us go;" all obstacles will be removed. But where shall she go forth? Into the field—the world (Matt. xiii. 38). In the power of the Holy Spirit, baptized with strength from on high, she enters on a glorious work; and the world is the scene of her labours for Christ: "Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations: spare not, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes. For thou shalt break forth on the right hand and on the left; and thy seed shall inherit the Gentiles, and make the desolate cities to be inhabited. Fear not; for thou shalt not be ashamed;

neither be thou confounded ; for thou shalt not be put to shame : for thou shalt forget the shame of thy youth, and shalt not remember the reproach of thy widowhood any more. For thy Maker is thine husband ; the LORD of hosts is his name ; and thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel ; the God of the whole earth shall he be called " (Isa. liv. 2-5).

It is the day of the Lord's power, when the people willingly offer themselves ; and the triumphant song of Deborah is about to become the new song of the Church.¹ How beautifully do the words in Judges v. 11 compare with those in Isa. xii. 3 : " They that are delivered from the noise of archers in the places of drawing water, there shall they rehearse the righteous acts of the LORD, the righteous acts toward the inhabitants of his villages in Israel : *then shall the people of the LORD go down to the gates.*" " Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation." " For the LORD JEHOVAH is my strength and my song ; he also is become my salvation."

¹ The deliverance of Israel by means of Deborah was celebrated in a song which abounds in expressions used in the prophecies, to denote a time of manifestation of God's power for the deliverance of His people from spiritual foes, and the spread (through their means) of His kingdom. " Praise ye the LORD for the avenging of Israel, when the people willingly offered themselves." In Ps. cx. we read, " Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power."

" LORD, when thou wentest out of Seir, when thou marchedst out of the fields of Edom, the earth trembled, and the heavens dropped, the clouds also dropped water." In Isa. lxiii. the Lord is represented as coming from Edom.

" The mountains melted before the LORD, that Sinai from before the LORD God of Israel."

In Isa. lxiv. the prayer is, " Oh that thou wouldest rend the heavens, that thou wouldest come down, that the mountains might flow down at thy presence !"

" Awake, awake, Deborah ; awake, awake, utter a song." In

The Church having at last realized her perfect freedom in Christ, the struggles within (so faithfully delineated by Paul in the seventh of Romans), give place to the "walking at liberty" described in the eighth of Romans.

While drawing water from the wells of salvation, the noise of the archers (once so grievous) molests her not: and she, in the strength of JEHOVAH, will rehearse the righteous acts of the LORD, and His infinite mercy to the inhabitants of the villages in Israel. When she has gone through these, proclaiming "the LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin, *and that will by no means clear the guilty*; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation," then (as in the thirteenth verse of this chapter of Canticles) may we

Isa. lx. we read, "Arise, shine; for thy light is come;" and in Isa. lii., "Awake, awake; put on thy strength, O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem (her garments of praise)." Again, in Eph. v. 14, "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead." "Arise, Barak, and lead thy captivity captive, thou son of Abinoam."

In Ps. lxviii. 18 we read, "Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive."

This Paul tells us was fulfilled when Christ ascended into heaven; but will there not be a second fulfilment when the beast and false prophet are cast into the lake of fire, and Satan is bound a thousand years (Rev. xix.); and a third, when he is finally overcome (Rev. xx.), and death and hades are destroyed?

Those who "jeopardied their lives unto the death in the high places of the field," were Zebulon (dwelling), and Naphtali (wrestling). Those in whom God's Spirit manifestly dwells, and those who wrestle with Him in prayer, are the truest soldiers of the Cross.

look for the close of this dispensation—the drawing near to the gates.¹

The approach of the year of jubilee seems indicated here, when the trumpet will be sounded throughout all the land, and the proclamation of liberty and pardon through the blood of Jesus announced to the very ends of the earth. In this proposal, "Let us lodge in the villages," there seems a determined resolve to bring the knowledge of salvation to the lowest and the least. In the jubilee, the houses of the villages which had no walls² round about them, were to be counted as the fields of the country. They might be redeemed, for redemption belonged unto them: they were to go out in the jubilee (Lev. xxv. 31). In the parable of the marriage supper the people in the hedges and highways were *the last invited*; but they were to be *compelled* to come in.

Ver. 12. *Let us get up early to the vineyards; let us see if the vine flourish, whether the tender grape appear (open), and the pomegranates bud forth: there will I give thee my loves.*

In this proposal the King demands from her diligence, self-denial, zeal. He expects His people to be "not slothful in business;" but "fervent in spirit; serving the Lord" (Rom. xii. 11). He speaks of "vineyards:" the many places where the true vine has been

¹ "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and *then* shall the end come" (Matt. xxiv. 14). It appears, however, that the cities of literal Israel shall not be gone through till afterwards: "Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come" (Matt. x. 23).

² "Having no walls,"—outcasts as it were, without security or defence.

planted. It was foretold by Jeremiah, "Thou shalt yet plant vines upon the mountains of Samaria: the planters shall plant, and shall eat them as common things" (Jer. xxxi. 5).

In this word "vineyards," do we not see how the narrow, sectarian bigotry of former times has given place to the charity which prays for grace on "all who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity." It is the King who speaks of "*vineyards*:" and His Spirit dwells in her heart. She is to go *with Him* to see if the vine flourish, if the tender grape open, if the pomegranate bud. Leaves alone will not do. There must be fruit.

Once she is fitted for her work, her work begins. The power bestowed upon her (at the close of the sixth chapter) is not to lie idle. When God gives us talents, He expects us to use them at once in His service, and that with all might. And when the Church's work on earth is ended, when her mission is accomplished, and when, with the Spirit of her Lord accompanying, and supporting, and cheering her, she has gone over the whole world, and preached the gospel to every creature—nay, *even while so occupied*, He assures her, "*There will I give thee my loves.*" There and then will the fullness of His love be revealed to her; there and then will she have glorious views of the transcendent grace which led Him to Calvary. She shall see Him as He is, and shall know even as she is known. Love shall then be perfected in her, and she shall be filled with the fullness of God.

In some degree this promise is fulfilled to every Christian who seeks in God's strength to make Christ known to sinners. Even while thus engaged for the Master, the Master's love is being more and more revealed to

him ; and a sense of this love warms his spirit, and braces him to more arduous efforts in the cause of Christ. The prayerful, working Christian is always a happy being, even though outward circumstances seem opposed to his comfort and peace. The reason may be found in this promise,—“ there” (while engaged in work for me) “ will I give thee my loves.”

Ver. 13. *The mandrakes give a smell, and at our gates are all manner of pleasant fruits, which I have laid up for thee, O my beloved.*

Here is introduced a plant not mentioned before in this Song,—a plant the meaning of which is in this place full of beauty and interest. The smell of the mandrakes indicates that she at last perceives her union with Christ is soon to be proclaimed to the universe ; that the announcement made in heaven (Rev. xix. 7) is to be clearly recognised on earth. The King exclaims, “ The mandrakes give a smell.” It is He who tells her that her hopes are about to be fulfilled, her longing desires granted,—that at last she may be said to have “ won Christ :” won Him as Paul longed to win Him, as every earnest Christian longs.¹ Henceforth

¹ It was to this point all Paul’s expectations tended. “ Yea, doubtless, I count all things loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord ; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, *that I may win Christ*, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith : that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death ; if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead. Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect : but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended ” (Phil. iii. 8-13). This is

self will in her be annihilated, and Christ be all. She will know nothing but Him. She will live for Him alone ; and as she nears the everlasting gates—those gates where her Husband and LORD is known,¹ and where, by virtue of her union with Him, she has a right to enter, she perceives that which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to perceive ; the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him.

The King of glory has entered into the holiest, and has flung open the gates, that she (the righteous nation which keepeth the truth) may enter also.² He calls them “our gates ;” hers as well as His,—hers, *because* His. All things are hers. All things present, and all things to come.³ She is *an heir of God*, and a joint-heir with Christ (Rom. viii. 17).

The King invites her to anticipate the glory which is in store for her ; that far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory which will make past trouble be forgotten. He speaks to her of all manner of fruits, new and old, which He has reserved for His redeemed,—His beloved,—her in whom His soul delighteth,—on whom the affections of His heart are placed. Like the householder in the parable,⁴ amongst His treasures are joys of which she

evidently one of the latest of Paul's epistles. It is the inspired letter of an advanced Christian.

When Reuben brought home mandrakes to Leah, she at once declared that she had won her husband.

¹ It is said of the virtuous woman (Prov. xxxi. 23), that “her husband is known in the gates.” This virtuous woman is evidently a picture of the Church of Christ.

² This passage occurs, Isa. xxvi. 2.

³ This Paul assures her in 1 Cor. iii. 21-23.

⁴ “Every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven, is like unto a man, an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old” (Matt. xiii. 52).

had foretastes on earth ; and others, *of which she could never have conceived.*

“ Oh how great is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee ; which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee before the sons of men ” (Ps. xxxi. 19).

What delightful visions had Jacob in that dream near Haran ;¹ what sights of glory ; what exceeding great and precious promises ! At the gates of heaven are laid up by Jesus for His people all manner of pleasant fruits, new and old.

¹ “ And he (Jacob) was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place ! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven ” (Gen. xxviii. 17).

CHAPTER VIII.

AND now comes the yearning, tender, pleading exposition with others to seek the blessings she enjoys. She is going forth into the field and lodging in the villages, and Christ is with her by His Spirit. The entreaties she uses are such as He dictates. "The Spirit and the bride say, Come" (Rev. xxii. 17).

Ver. 1. *Oh that thou wert as my brother, that sucked the breasts of my mother ! I should find thee without, I would kiss thee ; yea, I should not be despised (they should not despise me).*

"*Thou*"—every one she meets. Christ came to save sinners, and she wants to lead sinners to Christ, therefore her address is large, unlimited as His. "*Ho, every one!*"¹ She longs that those not yet brought to Christ may be led to Him, and become her brothers and sisters in the Lord. "*Oh that thou wert as my brother, that sucked the breasts of my mother !*" That thou wert born again ! that thou couldst know the value, and wouldst feed upon, the sincere milk of the Word ! Oh that the consolations of the gospel were thine, that thou wert a citizen of the Jerusalem which is above ! "*I*

¹ "Ho, every one that thirsteth" (Isa. lv. 1). All thirst for something, though few find the water of life, which alone can satisfy the thirsty soul.

should find thee without." Nothing could stop me. The constraining love of Christ within me would urge me to seek thee out. Thou art without Christ, an alien from the commonwealth of Israel, a stranger from the covenant of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world (Eph. ii. 12). I must, in God's name and strength, do my utmost to rescue thee, poor perishing sinner.

"I would kiss thee:" for the love of Christ is shed abroad in my heart; and I cannot choose but love thee, and yearn over thine immortal soul. It is by love I would try to win thee. It was by love my Saviour won **me**, and His Spirit leads me in His blessed footsteps.

"Yea, I should not be despised." What a Christ-like spirit! She is ready to bear contempt and ignominy, if only Christ's gospel can gain a hearing. Nay, she would rejoice if she were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.

But do we not see here a readiness on the part of those to whom the good news is brought, to receive and accept it? So far from being despised, she shall have praise and fame in every land where she has been put to shame, for God will make her a name and a praise among all people of the earth.¹

¹ The lament of Jeremiah was that of the Church in former times: "Woe is me, my mother, that thou hast borne me a man of strife, and a man of contention to the whole earth! I have not lent on usury, nor men have lent to me on usury; yet every one doth curse me" (Jer. xv. 10). The state of the Church, as spoken of in Cant. vii. and viii., seems to be the very reverse. "I will get them praise and fame in every land where they have been put to shame. I will make you a name and a praise among all people of the earth" (Zeph. iii. 19, 20). "The sons also of them that afflicted thee shall come bending unto thee; and all they that despised thee shall bow themselves down at the soles of thy feet; and they shall

Ver. 2. *I would lead thee, and bring thee into my mother's house, who would instruct me : I would cause thee to drink of spiced wine of the juice of my pomegranate.*

Led herself by the Spirit, she will seek to lead others. Thus the apostle entreated the Corinthians to be followers of him, even as he was of Christ. She will not be satisfied till she has brought them into a place of safety ; her mother's house,—the Jerusalem which is above, the holy mountain, the mountain of the house of the LORD.¹ In this house, and within these walls, will God give them a name and a place better than of sons and of daughters : an everlasting name that shall not be cut off. She expects instruction from her mother ; and it is interesting to observe that the law which guided her in her early days guides her now, even though she has attained to such stature, and is no longer a child. The Father's commandment, the mother's law, are still bound about her heart, and tied about her neck. "For the commandment is a lamp, and the law is light" (Prov. vi. 23). The order is unrepealed, "To the law and to the testimony" (Isa. viii. 20). The Word of God is still the unerring guide. "This is the law of the house ; upon the top of the mountain, the whole limit thereof round about most holy.

call thee, The city of the LORD, The Zion of the Holy One of Israel" (Isa. lx. 14). "All that see them shall acknowledge them, that they are the seed which the Lord hath blessed" (Isa. lxi. 9).

¹ "Also the sons of the stranger, that join themselves to the LORD, to serve him, and to love the name of the LORD to be his servants, every one that keepeth the sabbath from polluting it, and taketh hold of my covenant ; even them will I bring to my holy mountain ; and make them joyful in my house of prayer ; their burnt-offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon mine altar : for mine house shall be called a house of prayer for all people" (Isa. lvi. 6, 7).

Behold, this is the law of the house" (Ezek. xliii. 12).

In the mother's house (the temple built by Eternal Wisdom, and resting upon a sure and perfect foundation¹) there is store of all things needed to replenish the weary soul. "She hath mingled her wine; she hath also furnished her table" (Prov. ix. 2); and she longs to bring in the worn-out heavy-laden sinner, and make him share the feast.

In the spicing of the wine there seems reference to the sweet incense of Christ's intercession. She exclaims, "*I would cause thee to drink of the spiced wine of the fruit of the pomegranate.*" I will make known to thee all the benefits of that wonderful work in which the death, resurrection, and intercession of Jesus form the prominent features. *You must drink.* If you refuse, you remain without spiritual life: and how shall you escape if you neglect so great salvation? (Heb. ii. 3.) The gospel which was proclaimed by Christ and His apostles is what she entreats poor sinners to accept.

Ver. 3. *His left hand under my head, and his right hand should embrace me.*

The Spirit of God holds up Christ as the only object of worship, exalts Him, lifts Him up, in order that those who are without may see and be drawn towards Him. This characterizes the preaching of the Church in this chapter. *Christ manifested in her, and Christ manifested by her.* She has no strength of her own, and is perfectly conscious that if He withdraw His arm she must fall. But her faith is firm, and she

¹ "Wisdom hath builded her house, she hath hewn out her seven pillars; she hath killed her beasts; she hath mingled her wine; she hath also furnished her table," etc. (Prov. ix. 1, etc.)

feels the soothing, strengthening presence of her Lord. She knows she is not alone; that the Spirit of the living God is with her, and the everlasting arms beneath her. She acknowledges whence cometh her help, and states her conviction (based on the Divine promise) that Christ *must be glorified*, and that for this purpose the Spirit of God will support her in her efforts to make Him known.

Ver. 4. *I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, that ye stir not up, nor awake my love, until he please.*

Why this solemn charge? It seems as if she dreaded human interference, as if the slightest human intervention would jar on her feelings and injure her work. Conviction of sin and the new birth must be the work of the Spirit alone. How often we forget this! How apt we are to push in and obtrude our help, as if God could not do without us! Whereas all we can do is to proclaim the gospel and entreat sinners to accept it, and pray that God may lead them to the knowledge of Himself.

How gently and beautifully does the Spirit remind us of all this, by putting in the mouth of the Bride this exquisite admonition, "I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, that ye stir not up, nor awake my love, until he please."

Ver. 5. *Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness leaning upon her beloved?*

Who is it that cometh up from the wilderness, leaving the desolate state in which she so long dwelt, when the holy cities were a wilderness, Zion a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation, when the vineyard of the LORD

was trodden down by many pastors, when His portion was a desolate wilderness? The indignation is over-past. "The LORD has comforted Zion, he has comforted all her waste places, and made her wilderness like Eden, her desert like the garden of the LORD; joy and gladness are found therein, thanksgiving and the voice of melody" (Isa. li. 3). The Church cometh up "leaning upon her beloved;" always most strong when feeling most her own insufficiency, and trusting solely to that strong arm. It is plain to onlookers whence she obtains strength.

I raised thee up under the apple-tree: there thy mother brought thee forth; there she brought thee forth that bare thee.

It is the King Himself who answers the question. It matters not who or what she was. *She is His.* "*I raised thee up under the apple-tree,*" Christ.¹ *There it was I first made myself known to thee.* There began thy spiritual life, *not in any efforts of thy own, but by my raising thee up.* It was when the Spirit led thee to me, the Tree of Life, and told thee to eat and live, that the first breath of life began to move thy soul.

"*I raised thee up!*" What a host of recollections will these simple words bring to her mind! A Saviour slain for her sins, "the just for the unjust"—His body laid in the grave, and rising again, because it was not possible that death could hold Him. The same Almighty power which caused His resurrection took her when dead in sins, gave her life, and raised her up to sit in heavenly places in Christ. The solemn obligation is

¹ See on Cant. ii. 3, "As the apple-tree among the trees of the wood, so my beloved," etc.

pressed upon her, that being risen with Christ, she must seek those things which are above, where He sitteth at the right hand of God. Whatever she is that is pure and lovely, is all Christ's work, His raising her up. How the Spirit glorifies Jesus in these few words !

"There thy mother brought thee forth, there she brought thee forth that bare thee." Clearly does this bring before us a great truth : The new birth takes place in a soul, only when that soul has been brought to Christ. Of such an one alone can it be said, "Ye are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem" (Heb. xii. 22). Side by side let us place these momentous words, the words of one who cannot lie : "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John iii. 16). "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John iii. 3). *"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature : old things are passed away ; behold, all things are become new"* (1 Cor. v. 17).

Ver. 6. *Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm ; for love is strong as death : jealousy is cruel as the grave : the coals thereof are coals of fire, a most vehement flame.*

This is her prayer, that Christ would engrave her name upon His heart, the place of His affections ; upon His arm, the instrument of His power. The consideration of what she has been induces this prayer. There is no pride or self-complacency here ; rather a feeling of deep humility, arising from a consciousness of her own utter weakness ; together with a holy boldness and

strong faith, which makes her trust implicitly His untiring love.

The seal upon His heart is *invisible to the world*: "The Lord knoweth them that are his." The seal upon His arm is *visible to all*: "Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity."¹ She wishes not only to be Christ's, but to be known to belong to Christ.

Allusion seems here made to the dress of the High Priest. Bearing her name upon His heart and shoulder the great Mediator and High Priest of His Church will not enter the holiest without her.

This prayer is dictated by the Spirit, and promise of answer is given before the words are breathed. "In that day, saith the LORD of hosts, will I take thee, O Zerubbabel (scattered to, or born in Babylon), my servant, the son of Shealtiel, saith the LORD, and will make thee a signet: for I have chosen thee, saith the LORD of hosts" (Hag. ii. 23).

But what is the reason of her prayer? "*For,*" she adds, "*love is strong as death.*" His love for her was such that it cost Him His life: and "greater love hath no man than this" (John xv. 13). His love has through death conquered death for her, and left only the shadow of that which subjected her in former times to bondage.² She has been baptized into his death; crucified with Him!

¹ "Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity" (2 Tim. ii. 19).

² "That through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their life-time subject to bondage" (Heb. ii. 14, 15). "Yea, though I walk through the valley of *the shadow of death*, I will fear no evil" (Ps. xxiii. 4).

Who can tell His love! Thus would the Spirit describe it, "Love is strong as death"—so strong that it led Him to death! Oh that our love to Him were strong as His to us—that we might be ready to lose our lives for Him, and count it all joy to do so! "*Jealousy is cruel as the grave.*" It is the rage of a man; therefore (because of it) he will not spare in the day of vengeance (Prov. vi. 34). She is "the Lamb's wife," and she feels her only safe place is bound to Him, engraven on Him. She prays Him to keep her heart from wandering, to fix her affections wholly on Himself; because His love is so strong, because His jealousy is so cruel.¹

This passion (the strongest of which the human heart is capable) is frequently used in Scripture to show the intense indignation of the Almighty at His people's turning from Him, or allowing others to occupy the place which should be His alone. Any deviation from strict allegiance to Him on the part of His Church, excites such indignation in the heart of God, as can only be compared to that raging passion in the human breast—jealousy.

In the past, how often and how fearfully has the Church aroused the jealousy of God! The prophets in the strongest terms warned Israel that her idolatries were regarded as a breach of the solemn covenant between a wife and her husband: and in similar language does James address the Christian Church, "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever, therefore, will be (even the wish is sin) a friend of the world, is the enemy of God" (James iv. 4). Oh that

¹ "I the LORD thy God am a jealous God" (Exod. xx. 5; Deut. v. 9). "He is a jealous God" (Josh. xxiv. 19).

And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity." 2 Tim. ii. 19.

It was specially with reference to the legs of Jesus the prophecy was given respecting the paschal lamb. "*A bone of him shall not be broken*." 1. Exod. xii. 46 : John xiii. 33-35.

There always have been two witnesses on earth to testify to the truth of God, and to sustain His Church. They are spoken of under other types in Zechariah and Revelation ; types suited to the characteristics the Spirit designs to exhibit in them. When He would show how continually they are supplied with grace, they are "*olive-trees* ;" when the brightness of their light is to be made manifest, they are *candlesticks*.² When their strength, durability, firmness, and responsible position are to be exhibited, they are "*pillars of marble*."

¹ The command was, "Neither shall ye break a bone thereof." John is the only Evangelist who notices the coincidence : — But when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs ; for these things were done that the scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken." The command respecting the lamb is repeated in Numb. ix. 12. David, speaking of "*the righteous*," says, "*God keepeth all his bones ; not one of them is broken*" (Ps. xxxiv. 20).

² "Behold a candlestick all gold, with a bowl upon the top of it, and his seven lamps thereon, and seven pipes to the seven lamps, which are upon the top thereof ; and two olive-trees by it, one upon the right of the bowl, and the other upon the left thereof. Then answered I, and said unto him, What are these two olive-trees upon the right of the candlestick, and upon the left thereof ? And I answered again, and said unto him, What be these two olive-branches, which through the two golden pipes empty the golden oil out of themselves ? And he answered me and said, Knowest thou not what these be ? And I said, No, my lord. Then said he unto me, These are the two anointed ones, that stand by the Lord of the whole earth" (Christ. (Zech. iv. 2, 3, 11-14). "And I will give power unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and three score days, clothed in sackcloth. These are the two olive-trees, and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth" (Rev. xi. 3, 4).

1

•



2

•

•

• •

•

the Church of the present would take warning by the past, and cease provoking the Lord to jealousy!

But in Canticles viii. 6 the jealousy of the King is ~~all~~ directed against those who would tear His Bride from His arms, or endeavour to entice her from His protecting care. The LORD's jealousy is *for* His land; His pity *for* His people. As of old He was jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with a great jealousy,¹ so now He is jealous for His elect; and this jealousy is cruel as the grave, which can never be satisfied.² The jealous man will not regard any ransom; neither will he rest content, though thou givest many gifts" (Prov. vi. 35). And if this be man's jealousy, what is God's? "Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the LORD's wrath; but the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of his jealousy: for he shall make even a speedy riddance of all them that dwell in the land" (Zeph. i. 18). With such a warning as the destruction of Babylon (that odious woman of Rev. xvii.) before her, no wonder the Bride exclaims, "Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm!"

"*The coals thereof are coals of fire*" (*already kindled*) but when heaped together, causing "*a most vehement flame.*" How terrible is the indignation of Jehovah! "Before him went the pestilence, and burning coals (diseases) went forth at his feet" (Hab. iii. 5). "There went up a smoke out of his nostrils, and fire out of his mouth devoured: coals were kindled by it. At the

¹ "Thus saith the LORD of hosts, I am jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with a great jealousy" (Zech. i. 14).

² "There are three things that are never satisfied, four say not, enough, the grave, etc. (Prov. xxx. 15, 16). The marginal reading of Cant. viii. 6 is "*hard as the grave.*" "There is no discharge in that war" (Eccles. viii. 8).

brightness before him his thick clouds passed, hail and coals of fire. The Lord also thundered in the heavens, and the Highest gave his voice; hail and coals of fire" (Ps. xviii. 8, 12, 13). "Behold, the name of the LORD cometh from far, burning with his anger, and the burden (strength) heavy; his lips are full of indignation, and his tongue as a devouring fire" (Isa. xxx. 27). "The light of Israel shall be for a fire, and his Holy One for a flame: and it shall burn and devour his thorns and his briers in one day" (Isa. x. 17). "For, behold, the LORD will come with fire, and with his chariots like a whirlwind, to render his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire. For by fire and by his sword will the LORD plead with all flesh: and the slain of the LORD shall be many" (Isa. lxvi. 15, 16). "He shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked" (Isa. xi. 4). Who would not in such a day rejoice that they were "set as a seal upon his heart, as a seal upon his arm"? Who would not long that they had followed the apostle's advice, "You who are troubled, rest with us; when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ"? (2 Thess. i. 7, 8.)

In that day those only will be safe who are "set as a seal upon his heart, as a seal upon his arm."

Ver. 7. Many waters cannot quench love,

What deep waters overwhelmed the Saviour during His pilgrimage on earth! The floods overflowed Him, the waters came in unto His soul (Ps. lxix. 1, 2).

But when the waters were deepest, then did His love show most divine. The depth of His sufferings never lessened His tender compassion, even towards those who caused His anguish. "Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end" (John xiii. 1). And when His people are assailed by trouble; when "deep calleth unto deep at the noise of his waterspouts, and all his waves and his billows pass over them" (Ps. xlii. 7); when temptations surround them on every side, and the waters seem ready to overwhelm them, and the stream to go over their soul" (Ps. cxxiv. 4, 5); how sweetly does Jesus make his promise felt. "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee" (Isa. xliii. 2). Tribulation cannot separate from His love (Rom. viii. 35-39).

In the vision seen by John (in the Revelation) of the Church in the wilderness, the serpent is represented as casting a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away of it. But the flood which he cast was swallowed up of the earth, and his wicked devices were frustrated: "When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the LORD shall lift up a standard against him (put him to flight)" (Isa. lix. 19).

Neither can the floods drown it:

"When the waves of death compassed me, the floods of ungodly men made me afraid; the sorrows of hell compassed me about; the snares of death prevented me; in my distress I called upon the LORD, and cried to my God: and *he did hear my voice out of his temple, and my cry did enter into his ears.* . . . He sent from above, he took me; he drew me out of many waters; he de-

livered me from my strong enemy, from them that hated me : for they were too strong for me. . . . He brought me forth also into a large place; he delivered me, because he delighted in me" (2 Sam. xxii. 5-7, 17, 18, 20).

How confidently does David speak of the safety of him who trusts God's love : "Surely in the floods of great waters they shall not come nigh unto him" (Ps. xxxii. 6). "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof" (Ps. xlv. 1-3). "The floods have lifted up, O LORD, the floods have lifted up their voice; the floods lift up their waves;" but "the LORD" (whose name is Love) "is mightier than the noise of many waters, yea, than the mighty waves of the sea" (Ps. xciii. 3, 4).

*If a man would give all the substance of his house for love,
it would utterly be contemned.*

And if it be so amongst men, how useless, nay, what a mockery of God to attempt to buy His love! Yet how many are trying to do so; to win His favour by a strictly moral life; by gifts to the poor; by an almost ceaseless round of devotion; by a painful self-abnegation! There are Pharisees even in our own day who think to propitiate God by the zealous performance of certain duties. Vain attempt, which can end only in bitter disappointment! All we have is a loan, and all we can offer God are His own gifts; and were it not so, were we rich in ourselves, and could we give all the treasures of earth for love, it would be utterly con-

temned. "We must let that alone for ever." Like the magician in the Acts, our offerings would only prove how little we understood the value of what we wished to purchase. But, thank God, what we cannot buy has been freely given: "Behold what manner of love the Father hath *bestowed* upon us!" (1 John iii. 1.)

The thought of Divine Love seems to awaken deep feeling in the bosom of the Bride. At once her attention is turned to the weaker brethren. The force of the apostle's appeal strikes her, "Behold, if God *so* loved us" (freely, fully, without reserve; *us*, undeserving, without one single redeeming point in our character), "we ought also to love one another" (1 John iv. 11).

Ver. 8. *We have a little sister,*

It is not *now* of those outside, but of those *within*, she speaks; those of whom Lot is the type—"saved as by fire:" who have been withdrawn from utter destruction in the world (with which they held too friendly intercourse), and whose faith just leads them beyond the doomed city.

"*A little sister.*" The smallness of her stature does not affect the relationship. She is as near to us, and should be as dear, as if she were strong, and tall, "like the palm-tree," having attained to "the fulness of the stature of Christ." She is of those whom Paul would have us treat so gently, so lovingly: for whom he would have denied himself so much, rather than cause them to fall: of those whom we treat (and may God forgive us) so inconsiderately, so harshly, who are scarcely mentioned by us in the day of our pride. She is "one for whom Christ died"¹ (1 Cor. viii. 11). Oh, Christian!

¹ "Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, not to doubtful dis-

does not this consideration move thee to pity and to love? It was the remembrance of the love of Christ which awakened the Bride's sweet sympathy, and has that love no power to move thee? Oh Saviour-God, when will Thy Spirit animate Thy people, and rouse them to a sense of their transgression? When wilt Thou make them feel that when they sin so against their weak brethren, they sin against Thee?

The Bride laments further concerning this little sister,

She hath no breasts :

Little consolation does she receive from the gospel, and little comfort can she therefore impart to others. It is to Jesus this lament is made. The Bride bears to Him the burden of the weak.¹ Doubtless the little sister has dwelt so long in Sodom, that the garment spotted of the flesh still clings to her, and she cannot put on the garment of praise. She scarcely realizes that she is clean escaped from them that live in error. She hardly believes in her safety. Bare salvation was all she seemed to desire, or have strength for; and she is putations" (to judge doubtful thoughts). "Why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ. . . . Let us not therefore judge one another any more; but judge this rather, that no man put a stumbling-block or an occasion to fall in his brother's way. . . . If thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died" (Rom. xiv. 1, 10, 13, 15).

¹ "Take heed lest *by any means* this liberty of yours become a stumbling-block to them that are weak. . . . Through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ. Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend" (1 Cor. viii. 9, 11-13).

more inclined to lament the destruction of the city where she had formed so many relationships, and such close friendships, than to enter into the joy of her Lord. Thus she dishonours her Divine Master, and gives a false impression of Him and His service.¹

In former times this was her iniquity ; pride, fulness of bread, and abundance, neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy ; but now that she has been mercifully drawn out of this state and escaped the

¹ The name of the city to which Lot prayed to be allowed to escape from Sodom was called "*Zoar*" (little), from the very circumstances attending his flight : "Thy servant hath found grace in thy sight, and thou hast magnified thy mercy, which thou hast shewed unto me in saving my life; and I cannot escape to the mountain, lest some evil take me, and I die; behold now, this city is near to flee unto, and it is a little one: Oh! let me escape thither (is it not a little one?), and my soul shall live." (Sodom was a *great city*, and its wickedness great.) "And he said unto him, See, I have accepted thee concerning this thing also, that I will not overthrow this city, for the which thou hast spoken. Haste thee, escape thither; for *I cannot do anything till thou be come thither*: therefore the name of the city was called *Zoar* (little). The sun was risen upon the earth when Lot entered *Zoar*." The little sister *must* be rescued, and put out of the reach of destruction. And it appears as if the plucking of these from the burning is to be the signal for the last judgment of God, to descend on the ungodly world. It is evident from Cant. vii., where the Bride prepares for missionary enterprise, and proposes to go forth into the field and lodge in the villages, that *we may expect the Church to turn her attention to those who are unconverted, before she seeks the spiritual welfare of the weak ones, whose want of strength is often calculated to provoke to anger rather than move to pity.* In the Church at the present day we see efforts to convert the outcasts; but little feeling is shown for the narrow-minded, *scarcely-saved*, little sister. Each section of the Church seems engrossed in itself. It is remarkable that in the view given to Moses of the Promised Land, the boundary extended on the south and the plain of the valley of *Jericho, the city of palm-trees (the height to which the Bride almost attains in Cant. vii.), unto Zoar, the little* (Deut. xxxiv. 3). In the lament over Moab (the descendant of Lot), we read, "*his fugitives shall flee unto Zoar*" (Isa. xv. 5). *Zoar, the little city, seems therefore to stand as a type of those barely snatched from destruction.*

corruption that is in the world through lust, why does she not give all diligence to grow in grace, and in the knowledge of Christ? Lacking *progress* in Divine life, and especially in brotherly kindness and charity, she has forgotten that she is purged from her old sins, and therefore cannot realize the *completeness* of her deliverance.

What shall we do for our sister in the day when she shall be spoken for?

In this question faith and love are beautifully blended. The love of God dwelling in the heart of the Bride, prompts the most vigorous efforts to assist and strengthen the small and weak sister. The language of the apostle is hers: "Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love another" (1 John iv. 11). "*She knows that she has passed from death unto life, because she loves the brethren;*" and having in some measure apprehended the love of God in laying down His life for her, she is ready to lay down her life for the weak sister. She loves, not in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth (1 John iii. 14-16). What a contrast to the case supposed by James: "If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you *say* unto them, Depart in peace, be warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body, what doth it profit?" (James ii. 15, 16.)

What is the day when this weak sister shall be spoken for?¹ It appears as if God had work appointed

¹ To the student of prophecy, the following passage from Amos vii. 1-9, will have deep interest, taken in connexion with the little sister. "Thus hath the Lord God shewed unto me; and, behold, he formed grasshoppers *in the beginning of the shooting up of the latter growth*; and, lo, it was the latter growth after the king's mowings, and it came to pass, that when they had made an end of eating the grass of the land, then I said, O Lord God, forgive, I

for her, and the Bride is anxious she should be fitted for that work, whenever the time comes for her to be called to it. Do we admire the spirit which anticipates the sister's need, and thinks beforehand how her deficiencies can be supplied? How opposed to the spirit which would rejoice in her fall, and call the world's attention to her failings! The one is of the earth, earthy—the other is of the Lord, from heaven!

Ver. 9. *If she be a wall,*

—Part of the building of God, having that only safe foundation on which the apostles and prophets were built—Christ Jesus. Has she been enabled to make a stand against prevailing wickedness, and in the midst of an evil world, to testify for God? If so, she needs further instruction in the ways of righteousness. She is small; she needs growth in grace and knowledge, instruction in the deeper things of God. She must be built up on her most holy faith (Jude 20). When for the time she ought to be a teacher, she needs that one teach her again the first principles of the oracles of God (Heb. v. 12). She has not exercised her senses to discern both good and evil, and has to be urged on unto perfection. If therefore she be a wall, the Bride says,

We will build upon her

We, not *I*. She looks upon herself as working with

beseech thee; *by whom shall Jacob arise? for he is small.* The LORD repented for this: It shall not be, saith the LORD. Thus hath the Lord God shewed unto me; and, behold, the Lord God called to contend by fire, and it devoured the great deep, and did eat up a part. Then said I, O Lord God, cease, I beseech thee; *by whom shall Jacob arise? for he is small.* The LORD repented for this: This also shall not be, saith the Lord God."

God.¹ Without Him she can do nothing. And it is not one member, or one sect; it is *all believers* who are to assist in this great work. Her faith appropriates the language of Nehemiah: "The God of heaven, he will prosper us; therefore we, his servants, will arise and build" (Neh. ii. 20).

The foundation having been already laid, to *that* we can add nothing; but let us build thereupon,² each one according to the working of Him who worketh in him mightily, and let us make sure that what we build will bear the searching fire which shall try every man's work of what sort it is. What the Bride designs to build upon her, is

A palace of silver;

a palace not for man, but for the LORD God (1 Chron. xxix. 1), and one of silver, *i.e.* understanding.

The gifts which have been so liberally bestowed on the Church, are "for the *edifying of the body of Christ*; till all come into the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Eph. iv. 12, 13). Freely she has received, freely she will give, and seek that the little sister may be filled with

¹ "For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, God's building" (1 Cor. iii. 9).

² "Now if any man build upon this foundation (Christ Jesus) gold, *silver*, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; every man's work shall be made manifest; for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work, of what sort it is" (1 Cor. iii. 12, 13).

In the rebuilding of Jerusalem under Nehemiah, the daughters of Jerusalem assisted. The law has its part to do in God's plans for His people. It is our schoolmaster, and the Spirit uses it to convince us of sin.

the knowledge of God's will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that she may walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power" (Col. i. 9-11).

If at this time God's people would act thus, "strengthening the weak hands, confirming the feeble knees" (Isa. xxxv. 3), how soon would the feeble among us become as David,—able with the most apparently foolish weapons to vanquish the greatest enemies.¹

And if she be a door,

—part of the same spiritual building, blessed by God to be a door of entrance, a means of leading others to the knowledge of Christ—

We will enclose her with boards of cedar.

The whole Church will receive and welcome her. We will not keep her at a distance, nor treat her with indifference. We will surround her, and show how highly we esteem her labours in the Lord. It seems as if the little sister greatly needed Christian fellowship and counsel. She may have admitted secret foes, by means of the openness of the door.² She may have forgotten to try the spirits by scriptural tests; and, bid-

¹ "They that be of thee shall build the old waste places: thou shalt raise up the foundations of many generations; and thou shalt be called The Repairer of the breach, The Restorer of paths to dwell in" (Isa. lviii. 12). "In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof: and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old: that they may possess the remnant of Edom, and of all the heathen, which are called by my name, saith the LORD that doeth this" (Amos ix. 11, 12).

² "He that biddeth him (that hath not the doctrine of Christ) God speed, is partaker of his evil deeds" (2 John 11).

ding "God speed" to many who abode not in the doctrine of Christ, may have become partaker of their evil deeds. In such a case she should indeed be enclosed by boards of cedar. The incorruptible Word should form a kind of safeguard around her to prevent the entrance of those who would destroy her; whilst those who are strong in the Lord and in the power of His might, should assist her to the utmost of their power, and stand by her for her help.¹

Ver. 10. *I a wall, and my breasts like towers : then was I in his eyes as one that found favour (peace).*

The Bride feels how much there is in common between her and the little sister : therefore she exclaims, "I am a wall." "I belong to the same building. I am to all intents and purposes *one* with her. *The height* is all the difference ; the materials and the Builder are the same. I am formed of stones reviled out of the heaps of rubbish which are burned ; and if I have been enabled to stand up boldly for the Lord, protesting against every error, if no breach is left in me, and my unbroken front manifests my unity and strength, the praise is none of mine, the glory is due to the great Master-builder, and to Him alone. It is He who has given value to materials otherwise worthless ; it is He who has made the consolations of the gospel to be

¹ If the little sister represent the branch of the olive-tree broken off because of unbelief, but to be grafted in again when their *hardness* is removed, and the fulness of the Gentiles brought in, it seems most appropriate that she should be compared first to "*a wall*," separating (as by a partition) the religion of the true God from idolatry of every kind ; and afterwards to a door, the means by which (the wall being broken down) all nations may enter into covenant with God. The fall of them has been the riches of the world.

strong in me, so that like towers of refuge my love is ready to welcome to Christ all the weary and heavy-laden. Once I knew nothing of love, because I was ignorant of God in Christ; and after I knew Him, my love was weak and limited; but He has taken me and filled me with His Spirit; and now the love of God within me aboundeth toward others, and I am myself sensible of possessing a peace and joy of which I formerly seemed incapable."

The love of Christ is manifested in anxiety for the salvation of others, and her tender solicitude for the little sister.

It is when her breasts are like towers, when her love has attained such height and fulness that she is in *His* eyes (the eyes of Him whom her soul loveth) as one that found favour or peace.¹ To her what matters the opinion of any other? "With me it is a very small thing that I shall be judged of you" (the members of the visible Church) "or of man's judgment; yea, I judge not mine own self. For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified; but he that judgeth me is the Lord" (1 Cor. iv. 3, 4). In His eyes she has found favour;

¹ The command to comfort God's people (twice spoken, because the thing is determined) goes forth at the time that the warfare of Jerusalem is accomplished. "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably (to the heart) to Jerusalem [up to this her heart is hardened that she cannot hear], and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned; for she hath received of the LORD's hand double for all her sins" (Isa. xl. 1, 2). To this time the following prophecies seem to refer: "Rejoice ye with Jerusalem, and be glad with her, all ye that love her: rejoice for joy with her, all ye that mourn for her: that ye may suck, and be satisfied with the breasts of her consolations; that ye may milk out, and be delighted with the abundance (or brightness) of her glory. For thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will extend peace to her like a river, and the glory of the Gentiles like a flowing stream; then shall ye suck, ye shall be borne upon her sides, and

that favour which is as a cloud of the latter rain, and as dew upon the grass ; which is life itself, and by which she stands so strong. It was for this favour David entreated : " Remember me, O LORD, with the favour that thou bearest unto thy people : O visit me with thy salvation ; that I may see the good of thy chosen, that I may rejoice in the gladness of thy nation, that I may glory with thine inheritance " (Ps. cvi. 4, 5).

The Church feels that *now*, in Christ's eyes, she is as one that *found* peace. The time when the message of peace would occasion war is ended. The reign of Solomon's great antitype is about to commence. The increase of Christ's government has brought increase of peace,—abundant, unending peace. When Jesus of Nazareth founded His kingdom on earth (a kingdom not of this world), He left peace to His disciples ; but our corrupt nature combines with the seductions of the world to make our hold of this treasure a most uncertain, tremulous one. *Is it not true that we rather believe peace to be had in Christ than realize our possession of it ?* Do we always know and feel persuaded that it is ours ? Does not our faith respecting it often grow very dim ;

be dandled upon her knees. As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you ; and ye shall be comforted in Jerusalem " (Isa. lxi. 10-13). " Thou shalt arise, and have mercy upon Zion ; for the time to favour her, yea, the set time, is come. For thy servants take pleasure in her stones, and favour the dust thereof. So the heathen shall fear the name of the LORD, and all the kings of the earth thy glory. When the LORD shall build up Zion, he shall appear in his glory " (Ps. cii. 13-16).

" His favour (that of the King) is as a cloud of the latter rain " (Prov. xvi. 15). " His favour is as dew upon the grass " (Prov. xix. 12).

Throughout this poem the well-being and growth in grace of the Church is always measured by her love—*i.e.* the love of Christ in her.

and if we ever actually possess it, does it not seem as if a very little thing would loose our hold? No doubt we ought to have it, and to have it *always*, so that no circumstances whatever could disturb it; but the fact is, our Christian walk is a most inconsistent, unsteady one; we are continually wandering from the paths of peace; and therefore peace is with us a transient, fitful visitor rather than an abiding, ever-present reality. God *has* spoken peace unto His people, and to His saints: but they have turned again to folly.¹ Let us individually and collectively pray for the peace of Jerusalem, the Jerusalem above, and entreat with David, "Peace be within her walls, prosperity within her palaces" (Ps. cxxii. 6, 7).

THE CHURCH REVIEWS THE PAST.

Ver. 11. *Solomon (Prince of Peace) had a vineyard*

The comparison of God's people to a vineyard is frequent in Scripture; and the parables referring to it are familiar to us all. In Isaiah v. the vineyard is spoken of as *the property* of the "well-beloved." In the parable of Matthew xxi., Mark xii., and Luke xx. the Son is "*the heir*;" for "we see *not yet* all things put under him" (Heb. ii. 8).

In Isaiah we are told that "the vineyard of the LORD of hosts" (the well-beloved) "is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant." At the conclusion of the gospel parables the Jews themselves declared that the vineyard would be taken from the husbandmen, and given to a nation bringing forth the

¹ David prophesied thus, "He (God) will speak peace unto his people, and to his saints: but" (as if foreseeing what might be expected from our evil nature) "let them not turn again to folly" (Ps. lxxxv. 8).

fruits thereof. Which of these periods is spoken of in Canticles? The period when the knowledge of the true God was almost entirely confined to the Jewish nation; or that when their rejection of Messiah caused the care of the vineyard to be transferred to others? "Solomon had a vineyard at *Baal-hamon*" (*one that possesses a multitude, a populous place*). It is not of Israel after the flesh *alone* we must understand this. It is of the Church of God in all ages. The name of Baal-hamon brings us back to the covenant made with Abraham *previous to the circumcision*; and even before the name *Abraham* (i.e. *father of a great multitude*) was given, to keep him in perpetual remembrance of the promise: "Lift up thou thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art, northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: for all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever. And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered" (Gen. xiii. 14-16). "Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars if thou be able to number them. And he said unto him, So shall thy seed be. And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness" (Gen. xv. 5, 6). Again, "I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly." "Behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations (a multitude of nations). Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations (father of a great multitude) have I made thee. And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee. And I will

establish my covenant between me and thee, and thy seed after thee, in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee. And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger (the land of thy sojournings), all the land of Canaan for an everlasting possession ; and I will be their God. And God said unto Abraham, Thou shalt keep my covenant, therefore, thou, and thy seed after thee, in their generations. This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me, and thee, and thy seed after thee : every man-child among you shall be circumcised" (Gen. xvii. 2-10). "In blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea-shore ; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies : and *in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed*" (Gen. xxii. 17, 18). "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many ; but as of one, *And to thy seed, which is Christ*" (Gal. iii. 16). "Know ye therefore, that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, In thee shall all nations be blessed. So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham." "If ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal. iii. 7, 9, 29). "Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace ; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed : not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all (as it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations),

before him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth ~~the~~ dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were: who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be" (Rom. iv. 16-18). "For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God" (Rom. ii. 28, 29).

The Bride, in naming Baal-hamon as the place of the vineyard, shows the fulfilment of the promise which secured to Abraham a seed numberless as the dust which covers the earth—as the stars which stud the sky. Looking back to Abraham her father, and to Sarah who bare her, she at one glance, in one word, retraces and brings before our view, all the way by which the Lord has led His people. "After this (the sealing of the tribes of the children of Israel), I beheld, and lo, *a great multitude, which no man could number*, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; and cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb" (Rev. vii. 9).

He let out the vineyard unto keepers:

"He let it forth to husbandmen, and went into a far country for a long time" (Luke xx. 9). These husbandmen having failed to render Him the fruits, and having treated with ignominy the servants sent to receive them; the well-beloved Son was commissioned to visit

the vineyard: "He came unto his own, but his own received him not" (John i. 11). The rejection and murder of the Son occasioned the judgment and destruction of the husbandmen; and the care of the vineyard was transferred to others.

Who these new keepers were, Paul tells us in his letters to the Corinthian Church. To the Church itself he says, "Ye are God's husbandry." Of himself, in common with all who truly and faithfully taught the Word, he states, "We are labourers together with God" (1 Cor. iii. 9). "Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God" (1 Cor. iv. 1). "We are ambassadors for Christ," "workers together with him" (2 Cor. v. 20; vi. 1). How carefully these keepers guarded the vineyard; with what anxiety they watched night and day that the gospel might bring forth fruit in the hearers; that no root of bitterness should spring up; and that everything which might hinder the fruit being brought to perfection, should be at once and effectually destroyed,—the Epistles, written with such loving earnestness, testify. How different from later times, to which the words of Jeremiah may well be referred: "Many pastors have destroyed my vineyard, they have trodden my portion under foot, they have made my pleasant portion a desolate wilderness. They have made it desolate, *desolate it mourneth unto me*; the whole land is made desolate, because no man layeth to heart" (Jer. xii. 10, 11).

Every one for the fruit thereof was to bring a thousand of silver.

"So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God" (Rom. xiv. 12). As in the parable of the Talents

(Matt. xxv. 14-30; Luke xix. 12-27), each servant was expected to show some return for what had been confided to him, so these husbandmen are to bring a thousand pieces of silver. In studying Cant. i. 11 we saw that silver symbolized knowledge—the knowledge of the Holy which is understanding; and it is this which the owner of the vineyard requires, “For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and *the knowledge of God* more than burnt-offerings” (Hos. vi. 6). This is the fruit of the gospel; and for this purpose it is to be preached throughout the world—viz., that man may know God, which he can only do in Christ Jesus. “This is life eternal, that they may know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent” (John xvii. 3). “Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace: thereby good shall come unto thee” (Job xxii. 21). It is prophesied by David, that every one shall submit himself with pieces of silver;¹ and Scripture assures us that all the wisdom, knowledge, and talent of the world shall yet be consecrated to God’s service. From all places shall these offerings be brought; for “He shall have dominion from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth. They that dwell in the wilderness shall bow before him; and his enemies shall lick the dust. The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall bring presents; the kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts. Yea, all kings shall fall down before him, all nations shall serve

¹ “Because of thy temple at Jerusalem, shall kings bring presents unto thee. Rebuke the company of the spearmen, the multitude of the bulls, with the calves of the people, till every one submit himself with pieces of silver: scatter thou the people that delight in war” (because it is to be a time of peace, under Solomon, Prince of Peace). “Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God” (Ps. lxxviii. 29-31).

him" (Ps. lxxii. 8-11). "From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia, my suppliants, the daughter of my dispersed shall bring mine offering" (Zeph. iii. 10).

The dross which now mixes with all our knowledge shall be purged away; for the messenger of the covenant "shall sit, a refiner and purifier of silver; and he shall purify the sons of Levi (the royal priesthood of 1 Pet. ii. 9), and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the LORD an offering in righteousness" (Mal. iii. 3). All which obscured the reflection of His countenance in us, all which dimmed our knowledge, shall then be removed. We shall see Him as He is, and know even as we are known.

Ver. 12. *My vineyard, which is mine, is before me :*

The Bride says of this vineyard, It is mine (mine because His), and it is before me. We need not to look out of our way for work. The command to every Christian is, "Go, work *to-day* in my vineyard." God places our work before us; and "*whatsoever our hand findeth to do*, let us do it with *our might*" (Eccles. ix. 10): let us put to it the strength of *Christ*, and do it heartily as to the Lord, and not to man. "As every man hath received the gift, minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God;¹ if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth; that God *in all things* may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever" (1 Pet. iv. 10, 11). "Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus,

¹ That is, in strict accordance with the Word of God.

giving thanks to God and the Father by him" (Col. iii. 17). The Son of man, when leaving the world, "gave authority to his servants, and *to every man his work*" (Mark xiii. 34). How happy are those who feel every work (even the little every-day duties of life) for the Lord, and who, whether they eat or drink, or whatsoever they do, do all to His glory (1 Cor. x. 31).

The Church's work lies before her. Each member has his appointed task. The keepers' work lies before them. Every soul is either out of Christ (and should therefore be won to Him), or in Him (and therefore to be strengthened in the faith). There is no lack of work, no need to grumble because there is nothing to do for the Master.

Thou, O Solomon, must have a thousand, and those that keep the fruit thereof two hundred.

To the King of Glory, Prince of Peace, belongs *all*. "Thine, O LORD, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty; for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O LORD, and thou art exalted as head above all. Both riches and honour come of thee, and thou reignest over all; and in thine hand is power and might, and in thine hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all. Now, therefore, our God, we thank thee, and praise thy glorious name. All things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee" (1 Chron. xxix. 11-14). As a matter of debt the keepers deserve nothing. "Which of you, having a servant ploughing, or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, when he is come from the field, Go, and sit down to meat? And will not rather say unto him, Make ready wherewith I

may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken, and afterward thou shalt eat and drink? Doth he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow not" (Luke xvii. 7-9).

This is the manner of men; but "God's thoughts are not our thoughts, neither are our ways his ways" (Isa. lv. 8). We are indeed unprofitable servants, and have not even done that which was our duty to do;¹ but Jesus in His infinite grace promised His disciples that those who followed Him, and for His sake forsook houses, brethren, sisters, father, mother, wife, children, or lands, should, in the regeneration, receive an hundred-fold (Matt. xix. 28, 29). Immediately before witnessing the reaping of the earth's harvest the apostle heard a voice from heaven, saying unto him, "Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth; Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and *their works do follow them*" (Rev. xiv. 13-16).

In the parable of the householder hiring labourers for his vineyard, the master promised to give to each whatsoever was right (Matt. xx. 1-16). The LORD's word is pledged that they who sow in tears shall reap in joy: that he who goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him (Ps. cxxvi. 5, 6).

What was the hope, the joy, the crown of rejoicing to which Paul looked forward in the presence of the

¹ "So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants; we have done that which was our duty to do." And we have not done all, and whatever has been done of good, is the Spirit's work, using us as means.

Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? (1 Thess. ii. 19).¹ For what purpose did he deny himself even lawful enjoyments? Was it not that he might "by all means save some;" that he might *with his flock* be partaker of the glory hereafter? Men running for earthly honours were temperate in all things, but the crown he sought to gain (souls won to Christ, and glorifying the Saviour) was incorruptible.² This is the crown of glory that fadeth not away, which the Chief Shepherd will bestow on those who feed His flock. "They that be wise (teachers) shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness, as the stars for ever and ever" (Dan. xii. 3). "Whoso keepeth the fig-tree, shall eat the fruit thereof; so he that waiteth on his master shall be honoured" (Prov. xxvii. 18).

Now we see not the fruit of our labours, and often are we sore discouraged because the seed seems to have perished, and no effect is produced, but the command is, "In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good" (Eccles. xi. 6). "Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days"

¹ The apostle answers the question thus, "Ye are our glory and joy."

² "For though I be free from all, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all, that I might by all means save some. And this I do for the gospel's sake, that I might be partaker thereof with you. Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible" (1 Cor. ix. 19-25).

(Eccles. xi. 1). "Blessed are ye that sow beside all waters, that send forth thither the feet of the ox and the ass" (Isa. xxxii. 20).

We are not promised that the success of our efforts shall be manifested *yet*. On the contrary, we read, "Before those days there was *no hire for man (the hire of man became nothing), nor any hire for beast*; neither peace to him that went out or came in, because of the affliction; for I set all men every one against his neighbour. But now" (and it appears that the verse under consideration refers to this time), "I will not be unto the residue of this people as in former days, saith the LORD of hosts. For the seed shall be prosperous; the vine shall give her fruit, and the ground shall give her increase, and the heavens shall give their dew; and I will cause the remnant to possess all these" (Zech. viii. 10-12). "They shall build houses, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them. They shall not build, and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and another eat; for as the days of a tree are the days of my people, and mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands. *They shall not labour in vain*, nor bring forth for trouble: for they are the seed of the blessed of the LORD, *and their offspring with them*. And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear" (Isa. lxv. 21-24). Spiritually as well as literally, we may look for the performance of these promises.

In the meantime the vineyard of the Church lies before her, to cultivate for Him whose is the earth, and the fulness thereof. In faith, hope, and love, let her toil on; knowing that in due season the Prince of Peace, Lord of the vineyard, will come to claim His

thousand, and to bestow on His faithful keepers the promised two hundred—the double tithe, the reward “determined” on, and “prepared” by God.

The vision is ended. The LORD has made all His goodness pass before her, from the moment He awakened in her heart the first feeling of love towards Him, and longing for union with Him, to the very entrance into a more glorious state, where, as His Bride, she will enjoy pleasures for evermore.

And what has been the result of the magnificent vision?

HER FAITH IS STRENGTHENED.

Ver. 13. *Thou that dwellest in the gardens,*¹

All sense of loneliness and depression is gone. Invisible save to the eye of faith, He, her beloved, *dwelleth* in the gardens; not a stranger in the land, not a way-faring man that turneth aside to tarry for a night (Jer. xiv. 8), but one that dwelleth among His people, in the tents of Jacob, the tabernacles of Israel, which, as gardens, are spread forth by the river of life.² She must never murmur more, for He has said, “I will never leave thee nor forsake thee,” and she can boldly add, “The LORD is my helper, I will not fear what man will do unto me.”

¹ She speaks of *gardens*, as He did of “*vineyards*,”—all, no matter who or where, that love the Lord.

² “How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, thy tabernacles, O Israel! As the valleys are they spread forth, as gardens by the river’s side, as the trees by the lign aloes which the LORD hath planted, as cedar-trees beside the waters” (Numb. xxiv. 5, 6).

HER HUMILITY IS DEEPENED.

The companions hearken to thy voice.

She has seen the reverence with which the angels worship, and how completely they are absorbed in hearkening to the voice of God's words, and in carrying out His directions. And in comparison how dull have been her ears, how heavy her heart! He has called her "companion—friend;" therefore she breathes this prayer—

Cause me to hear.

HER LOVE FOR THE WORD OF GOD IS MUCH INCREASED.

The voice of God cannot be heard by her in the same manner as by the angels; but His written Word is with her, and henceforward it must be her study, her delight. Her prayer will be constant that a hearing ear and an understanding heart may be given her.¹

She takes the place of the "little child." Her prayer is even more simple than that of Samuel. It is not, "Speak, LORD, for thy servant heareth:" but, "Cause me to hear;" the cry of utter helplessness and humility! When my old corrupt nature whispers to me of things in which I once took delight, when it would persuade me to lay aside the Saviour's yoke, and to take my ease, to eat and drink and be merry; then, O Immanuel, make thy voice to sound above that of my own nature, and *cause me to hear*. When the world would entice

¹ "The hearing ear and the seeing eye, the LORD hath made even both of them" (Prov. xx. 12). It was said of Lydia, "Whose heart the LORD opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul" (Acts xvi. 14). The Psalmist constantly prayed that his heart might be opened to understand God's Word.

me to join her ranks, to adopt her fashions, and become conformed to her ways, lest I should be reproached as peculiar or pharisaical; above the voice of persuasion or ridicule, *cause me to hear* Thy voice, my God. When Satan would seek to ensnare or terrify, when he would assail me with hard thoughts of my heavenly Father's ways, when he would make the chastisements of love appear the judgments of vengeance, then in Almighty power speak, LORD, and *cause me to hear*. When the hour of redemption approacheth, and signs of the times show the coming of the Lord to draw nigh, then let me not be dull or inattentive; make me as a faithful Bride to listen for the footsteps of the expected Bridegroom, and with delight to hail each sound which betokens His approach, "*Cause me to hear*."

It is the prayer for every Christian, at every period of life. At no time, in no place, may anything be heard above the voice of God. During our stay upon earth may that voice alone be our guide, instructing, reproving, cheering us! and may we (even now) have the promise fulfilled, "Thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left" (Isa. xxx. 21).¹

HER LONGING FOR THE SAVIOUR'S COMING IS MORE ARDENT.

Ver. 14. *Make haste (flee away), my beloved,*

"Let nothing either in thy Church or in the world

¹ This promise is for the Church in its fulness, as a reference to Isa. xxx. will show.

impede Thee. Oh send forth messengers to prepare Thy way! Turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and ~~the~~ disobedient to the wisdom of the just! Make ready a people prepared for the Lord!"

FAITH, HOPE, AND LOVE ARE QUICKENED.

Be thou like to a roe (for comfort), or to a young hart (for speed), upon the mountains of spices.

It is upon the mountains of spices she expects Him (not *one* mountain, but mountains). She recognises that in every portion of the Church, prayer ascends like incense before the throne, and is for Jesus' sake accepted. She knows that it will be in answer to these prayers (not from one community only, but from all believers, in every section of the Church), the beloved will come, bringing peace and comfort to His people. Shall not God hear His own elect, which cry unto Him day and night?

Believing hearts are ever looking upward with the prayer, "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly;" and earnest longings from those who never met on earth are mingling together, and swelling into one loud petition, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus." Even so, with healing beneath Thy wings, with peace and joy and love in Thy train! Before the prayer is breathed in Revelation, the answer is given, "He which testifieth these things, saith, *Surely* I come quickly. Amen" (Rev. xxii. 20). Does it not appear "that before they call, God answers; and while they are yet speaking, he hears"? (Isa. lxxv. 24.) It seems as if the beautiful prayer, "Cause me to hear," will become the prayer of the Church, before the Saviour's second coming. And, if so, how would the

voice of bigotry and the impudent intrusions of false doctrine be silenced! If God caused us to hear His voice, where would be the faithless cry, "What shall I eat, what shall I drink, wherewithal shall I be clothed?" Where would be the endeavour to obtain salvation in any way but the one appointed by the Father? Where would be the inconsistencies of the people of God? What an effect this prayer would have in purifying the Church; in preparing the Bride for the coming of the Bridegroom! But the Church of the present day has not learned this prayer. If she had, we should hear less of man's words, and of his opinions respecting God's Word, and more of the Scriptures themselves. There would be less of dogmatism, and more of patient waiting on the Lord; less of pride, self-sufficiency, party-spirit, and bitterness; and more humility, brotherly kindness, and love. The traditions of man would be laid aside, and the Word of God would take its proper place. It would be no longer, "What says this or that great man?" but, "What saith the LORD?" There would be the spirit of self-annihilation—the spirit to which Jesus declared that God would reveal the deep things of heaven.

When this prayer becomes the prayer of the Church, the unity of the Spirit (the teacher and inspirer of the prayer) will be manifest. As *one*, the people of God will plead, "Cause *me* to hear."

By this petition, the name of God will be hallowed, and His Word, which He hath magnified above all His name, will be glorified. In answer to it, His will shall be done on earth as it is done in heaven, and His long-looked-for kingdom will come. Like fragrance from the mountains of spices, filling the air with perfume; like



incense bearing a sweet savour to the throne of God, this prayer will rise, well-pleasing to Jehovah, because breathing the spirit of that beloved Son, whose delight was to do the will of His Father and to finish His work.





